

Council on the Ageing Queensland

Submission to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

February 2025



Council on the Ageing Queensland

Council on the Ageing Queensland is a for-purpose statewide charitable organisation.

We are the state's Seniors Peak and Seniors Social Isolation Prevention Peak and work with and for older adults, advancing the rights, needs, interests, and futures of people as we age. For more than 60 years, we have worked to influence positive social outcomes for older Queenslanders.

We connect directly with older Queenslanders, their families, carers, and organisations, service providers, consumer advocates, special interest groups, and our federal, state and local governments. We engage with all of these groups to understand needs, aspirations, and priorities for older people in Queensland, and partner to achieve the best outcomes for people as we age.

Our work includes policy analysis, community education, representation, evaluation and research, community engagement, and cross sector collaborations to achieve systemic change. We deliver funded programs directly to older people in need and provide sector support to those organisations who offer aged care and other services to older people.

We seek to eliminate ageism and support healthy ageing and growth of age-friendly communities. There are many areas of policy development needed to achieve this – elder abuse, energy, social isolation and loneliness prevention, climate resilience and disaster preparedness, digital inclusion, health, housing, and transport are just a few.

Our vision is that ageing is a time of possibility, opportunity, and influence.

With the number of older people expected to double by 2050, ensuring their voices are heard has never been more important.

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Acknowledgement

*Council on the Ageing Queensland acknowledges Australia's
First Nations Peoples as the original custodians of this land.*



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Recommendations

1. **Review current Queensland Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan to be more inclusive of contribution of older adults and sustainability of age-friendly communities**
2. **Invest in sustainable volunteering that better enables attraction and retention of older volunteers**
3. **Encourage intergenerational volunteering to promote knowledge-sharing and mentorship**
4. **Reduce digital barriers for older people by supporting community organisations to adapt with alternative engagement methods**
5. **Leverage existing public awareness campaigns to highlight benefits of volunteering**
6. **Invest in volunteer coordinators to adopt age-friendly practices**
7. **Reduce bureaucracy by simplifying compliance processes**
8. **Expand geographic scope of Volunteering Resource Centres and improve coordination of local opportunities**
9. **Encourage greater participation through financial incentives for dedicated volunteers**
10. **Engage First Nations communities in shaping volunteer programs to ensure alignment with community needs and older volunteer expectations**
11. **Develop a 'Volunteer Legacy' program for the 2032 Games that engages older volunteers in ongoing community service**
12. **Take urgent action to recruit and retain emergency, disaster and fire service older volunteers particularly in regional, rural and remote areas**

Older adults and volunteering

Queensland's older population is growing rapidly, reaching 926,700 people in 2023, and in 2053 expected to reach 1.7 million Queenslanders aged 65 years and over, including 340,000 aged 85 years and over. Currently, one in six older people do unpaid voluntary work, that is approximately 157,500 older people currently engaged in volunteering.

Older Queenslanders are diverse in their backgrounds and circumstances, and the breadth of considerations for health and wellbeing is increasing as we live longer, remain at home for longer, and participate and contribute for longer through volunteering, working, mentoring, and caregiver roles.

Volunteering Queensland highlighted¹ in 2023 that 52.3% of Queenslanders aged 65 and over (84,200 individuals) contributed to their communities through volunteering, with an average of 19.1 hours per month (or 111.1 million hours in the year). The primary drivers for older adults to volunteer included helping others (77.1%), enjoyment (47.2%), using skills and experience (45.3%), staying active (41.4%), and social or community connection (38%).

*Older Queenslanders bring diversity and lived experience to their volunteering roles.*²

- 1 in 3 older Queenslanders were born overseas, from 191 different countries, and 17.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders are 50+ years
- Half of all older persons live with a disability, and 23.4% of carers in Queensland are 65+
- 2674 Queenslanders reported experiencing or being at risk of elder abuse.
- 18% of older women are staying in the workforce longer (compared to 11.5% of men)
- 95% of older Queenslanders live in private dwellings, with 15% renting.

Figure 1. Examples of diversity in older Queenslanders

However, despite the critical role that older adults play in sustaining communities, they continue to encounter barriers which are problematic not only for the individual volunteer but also the provider, group, or organisation that has recruited them, or for communities in which informal volunteerism happens frequently (with no formal mechanisms or management in place) and there is the risk that volunteers become part of an unrecognised workforce.

Volunteering Queensland highlighted in 2023 that the top barriers for older Queenslanders to volunteer include a lack of time (41.8%), costs (14.5%), health reasons (13.1%), burnout (12.3%), and lack of interest (11%). The estimated cost to replace the hours volunteered by

¹ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024*. [Research/industry report]. <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2024-report/>

² References for statistics:

Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO). (2024). Population growth highlights and trends, Queensland, 2024 edition. <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/issues/3071/population-growth-highlights-trends-qld-2024-edn.pdf>

Queensland Government. (2024). *An Age-Friendly Queensland: The Queensland Seniors Strategy 2024 – 2029*.

https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/seniors/queensland-seniors-strategy-2024-2029.pdf

Queensland Government. (n.d.). *Queensland Seniors – a snapshot of older Queenslanders*. [Infographic, Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services]. https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/seniors/executive-summary-fact-sheet.pdf

older Queenslanders in 2023 was approximately \$4.6 billion (and it is estimated that for every \$1.00 invested in volunteering for older adults, an \$8.70 return is provided).

Nationally, it is also clear that the *older volunteer contribution to communities is significant, with efforts valued at billions per annum*. Thirty-five percent of Australians aged 50 years and over engaged in formal volunteering through an organisation or group, and volunteers aged 55 years and over contributed an average of 263 hours per annum (compared to 123 hours per annum for those aged 54 years and under). The primary drivers for older adults to volunteer included giving back to community, staying active and socially connected. Some common barriers for older volunteers include health issues, lack of time and difficulties with transport.³

One national example of where a volunteer workforce has been critical for service delivery is in aged care where volunteers were evidenced as essential to the delivery of person centred and quality care. Further, volunteer and volunteer managers collectively view their work as having great meaning and impact to communities they assist; however, volunteers and managers face ongoing challenges such as time commitments, lack of flexibility, lack of support from paid staff, limited or lack of accessible and appropriate training, limited feedback and direction, issues with recruitment and retention, role definitions, and respect in the workplace.⁴

From the *State of the Older Nation (SOTON)* 2021 survey, it was reported that 51% of older Australians were completing unpaid work each week with the most common activity being volunteering followed by childcare provision to grandchildren and caring for other reasons.⁵ In the 2023 SOTON survey,⁶ around half (49%) of older Australians undertook unpaid work with volunteering being the most common type (21% volunteer). Undertaking volunteering in the community increased steadily with age with sixteen percent of people aged 65 years compared to 22% of people aged 65 – 69 years, and 27% of people aged 70 years and over. Women were more likely than men to undertake unpaid work (53% compared to 45%) with volunteering being the most common form of unpaid work overall (1 in 5 participated in volunteering work). However, volunteers were older adults most likely to have sound financial security, and good mental and physical health.

The SOTON survey findings from 2021 to 2023 clearly indicate that older Australians contribute much of their time to unpaid labour, but this varied dependent on age, with people aged under 65 years reporting they are more likely to be caring for their parents, compared to people aged over 70 years who are more likely to undertake volunteer work and care for a partner. Caring for

³ Volunteering Australia. (2024). Key volunteering statistics March 2024. [Report]. <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-Australia-Key-Volunteering-Statistics-2024-Update.pdf>

⁴ These are part of the findings from the Volunteers in Aged Care survey (April – May 2023) which received 1597 responses. Department of Health and Aged Care, Australian Government. (2023). Volunteers in aged care are highly valued. [Research summary]. <https://agedcareengagement.health.gov.au/volunteers/>

⁵ COTA Federation. (2021). *State of the Older Nation (SOTON) 2021. A nationally representative survey prepared by Council on the Ageing*. [Research report, June 2021]. <https://cota.org.au/policy/state-of-the-older-nation-2021/>

⁶ COTA Federation. (2023). *State of the Older Nation 2023. A nationally representative survey prepared by Council on the Ageing*. [Research report, April 2023]. <https://cota.org.au/policy/state-of-the-older-nation/>

The SOTON research was commissioned by the Federation of nine Councils on the Ageing (COTA) – eight COTA state and territory organisations and COTA Australia – to understand the views, life experiences and needs of Australians aged 50 years and over. The SEC Newgate Research team conducted a nationally representative online survey with a sample of 2,750 Australians. Quotas were set for state and territory, metropolitan and regional areas, and gender and age. The data set was weighted using population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Census 2021 for age, gender, state, and location (capital/noncapital cities).

a partner was reported as the most time intensive unpaid labour (at 32 hours per week). The time spent caring for grandchildren (while parents are at work) in 2023 increased (11.1 hour per week – up two hours since 2021) while volunteer hours overall have decreased (5.7 hours per week – down 0.6 hours per week) since 2021.

Volunteering in age-friendly communities

Volunteerism is a huge part of sustaining age-friendly communities. An age-friendly community means older adults and their communities are best supported to age well and future generations of older adults have supports, services and spaces in place so they too can age well as their needs, interests, capacities, and contribution to community changes. An age-friendly community has been defined as one that fosters healthy and active ageing by creating an inclusive and accessible environment for people of all ages and abilities. Such communities promote diversity, inclusion, and cohesion, ensuring that older adults can age safely, continue personal growth and development, and contribute to their communities while retaining autonomy and dignity. Enablers of age-friendly communities are often associated with physical infrastructure e.g., accessible and safe transportation infrastructure, accessible buildings and housing, shade and public seating, safe pathways, roadways, and ample facilities. These environments enable older individuals to stay active, connected, and engaged in the economic, social, and cultural life of their community.^{7,8}

Other considerations for age-friendly communities include considerations of home and wider community environments that also cultivate healthy active ageing through building intrinsic capacity and enable functional ability according to the individual's capacity.⁹ This means the opportunities available to individuals during their lives, and given the immense diversity of older adult cohorts, there is no predictable trajectory for ageing in an age-friendly community.

Volunteering is one of the primary areas in which older people can utilise their lived experience, professional expertise, and cultivate interests and new (and developing) skills for their own health and wellbeing in addition to the health and wellbeing of their community. Volunteering crosses cultural, physical, social and economic environments, and it can present in different opportunities such as informal caregiver roles, retail environments, community hubs, creative arts, sporting and recreation activities, charitable organisations, aged care and community care environments, tourism, intergenerational education and learning, and much more.

⁷ World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Creating age-friendly cities and communities*. [Webpage]. <https://www.who.int/activities/creating-age-friendly-cities-and-communities>

⁸ We also note the work of community organisations such as Queensland Walks who advocate for accessible safe to navigate age-friendly infrastructure and outdoor spaces taking into consideration the impact of climate. Queensland Walks have demonstrated innovation through volunteer-based Citizen Science which informs their research and data development. <https://queenslandwalks.org.au/>

⁹ World Health Organization. (2023). *National programmes for age-friendly cities and communities: A guide*. [Report]. <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/366634/9789240068698-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

When looking at the national evidence there are factors which have been identified as influencing older adults' motivation to volunteer. Table 1. outlines some of these motivating factors (this list is not exhaustive).

Table 1. Factors which influence older adults' motivation to volunteer¹⁰

| Factor (generic) | Individual impact | Wider (or longer term) impact ¹¹ |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Benefits or motivations | | |
| | Enhancement (skill acquisition and development), greater understanding | Knowledge growth, psychological growth |
| | Recognition of individual traits, strengths, values, talents | Positively combatting societal ageism; productive social role modelling; debunking stereotypes |
| | Altruism | Helping others and wider community |
| | Maintaining interest over time | Variety of skills, roles, tasks, interactions |
| | Personal satisfaction | Personal growth, confidence |
| | Social connection | Community health and wellbeing, sense of community, group identity |
| | Feeling useful | Building confidence |
| | Relationship building | Intergenerational and familial connections |
| | Care | Assists people to stay in community and at home |
| | Support (emotional; general) | Feeling supported by community, family, friends |
| Barriers or challenges | | |
| | Time commitment | Work/life balance, other responsibilities, preference for flexibility and freedom |
| | Low self-esteem or low confidence | Placement and belonging within community |
| | Stereotypes and assumptions (from others); internalised ageism (self) | Ageism |
| | Proximity and access to volunteering opportunities | Accessibility |

¹⁰ Examples of national evidence for factors which influence volunteering incorporated into Tables 1. and 2.:

Warburton, J., Terry, D., Rosenman, L., & Shapiro, M. (2001). Differences between Older Volunteers and Nonvolunteers. *Research on Aging*, 23, 586 - 605. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027501235004>.

Warburton, J., & McLaughlin, D. (2005). 'Lots of little kindnesses': valuing the role of older Australians as informal volunteers in the community. *Ageing and Society*, 25, 715 - 730. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X05003648>.

Table 1. also informed from internal sector discussions with key agencies and collaborators including *Volunteering Queensland*.

¹¹ Anticipated wider impact identified by Council on the Ageing Queensland.

| Factor (generic) | Individual impact | Wider (or longer term) impact ¹¹ |
|------------------|--|---|
| | Feeling unsupported in less promoted/less common/least advertised volunteer roles (regardless of willingness, altruistic motives) | Limited research in understanding volunteering motivations in aged care home support settings, aged care settings, and other care contexts |
| | When volunteers are unfairly discriminated against or 'straight up' discrimination shown by a group or organisation towards prospective or current volunteers | Perpetuating ageism and discrimination; individual confidence and self-belief decreases |
| | Monopolisation of grant monies or funding opportunities. | Missed opportunities for innovation and new areas of volunteering including those areas that assist the most vulnerable and at-risk cohorts. |
| | Injury on the job and support for volunteer workers (and impact to livelihood and lifestyle if serious injury, financial situation regarding legal costs and supports, etc.). | No legislative, legal, or protective mechanisms in place. Review of adherence to existing workplace health and safety practices |
| | People often feel like they are on their own when navigating heavily committed roles or longer-term volunteering. | Volunteer burnout and fatigue. Higher turnover of volunteers – transient volunteer workforce |
| | Navigating insurance considerations and insurance coverage (and red tape barriers). | Organisational literacy around insurance and considerations for future recruitment and training of volunteer managers, coordinators |
| | Limited training for volunteer managers. | Increasing risk of unsafe management practices which impact on rights of individual volunteer, reputational risk to organisation |
| | Older people who are at risk of homelessness are more likely to have poor access to education, employment or volunteering opportunities (32% versus 7% not at risk). ¹² | Ongoing inequity and barriers to civic and economic participation. Lack of or limited diversity of lived experience within volunteer workforces |

¹² From the 2023 SOTON survey, at risk older adults who self-reported as more socially disconnected also experienced poorer sense of connection to their local community, friends and family, and poorer relationships with neighbours. See: COTA Federation. (2023). *State of the Older Nation 2023. A nationally representative survey prepared by Council on the Ageing*. [Research report, April 2023]. <https://cota.org.au/policy/state-of-the-older-nation/>

In addition to motivating factors, there are positive enablers which attract, retain and sustain volunteer workforces – see Table 2. for some specific examples.

Table 2. Positive enablers and change required to attract, retain and sustain volunteer workforce.

| Enablers | |
|--|--|
| 1. Social policy – Policy is responsive to ageing e.g., recognise positive contributions of older people (rather than solely focussed on demographic change and costs); invest in sustainability of volunteer workforces | 2. Recognition - Community recognition for role of volunteers e.g., certification, training, workshops to support retention of staff, awards, incentives; community and individual level experience - identity and belonging e.g., visibility in community, voices heard within community, being part of co-design, invitation to participation (just as important as direct participation itself), celebrations, social events, recognition of milestones |
| 3. Flexible approaches – short-term opportunities and flexible arrangements to attract more volunteers | 4. Organisation and group level planning – diversity of roles, use of indoor and outdoor spaces, management of volunteers, communication |
| 5. Positive ageing awareness – directly addressing ageism and ageist assumptions and promote positive volunteering contributions of older people | 6. Research - more research is required to understand different intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for volunteering in older adult cohorts |

Older Queensland volunteers

Queensland is a state with a dedicated (and by some reports) yet declining older adult volunteer workforce.¹³ Despite the challenges to volunteering for older adults and for managers and coordinators who oversee management of volunteers, and communities who are making do with limited resources and greater reliance on volunteer workforces, there are existing supports and initiatives, which indicate that there continues to be growing innovation in volunteering.

Reassuringly, there is a higher percentage of volunteer managers (76.1%) in Queensland who include older volunteers (aged 65 years and over) in their programs compared to their interstate

¹³ Council on the Ageing Queensland insights from multiple engagements across the state. These insights will be referred to throughout the current submission, including:

Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2021). *Social Isolation survey. [Internal dataset]*. Survey designed to inform the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness.

Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2023). *Listening Post 2022 Final Report*. Prepared for the Department of Seniors, Disability Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. [Internal report, January 2023].

Council on the Ageing Queensland (2023). *Programs for Older People survey. Initial insights*. [Internal research report]. Report prepared for Queensland state government.

Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2024). *Re-imagining Ageing. Regional Forums report October 2023 – June 2024*. Prepared for the Department of Child Safety, Seniors, and Disability Services. [Internal report, July 2024]

Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2025). *Older People and Volunteering in Queensland*. [Survey findings – service provider and community organisation perspectives]. Developed to inform Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering.

Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2025). *Older Queenslanders and Volunteering*. [Survey findings – older adult and community perspectives]. Developed to inform Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering.

colleagues (74.2% managers nationally).¹⁴ Across the state of Queensland there are many initiatives taking place, many of which happen in contexts unique to individual communities.

There are proactive local community groups that undertake mentoring and peer education type programs and learning sessions for older adults (with many members volunteering time to support these programs). Examples such as Brisbane Seniors Online (BSOL)¹⁵ and Gold Coast Seniors on the Net¹⁶ have built membership bases in their local regions to assist in building digital literacy and digital capabilities.

Other examples such as Circle of Men Inc,¹⁷ a not-for-profit group, provide volunteers to select residential aged care facilities in Brisbane and Redland City focussing on companionship and support for older men within the facilities, and in 2021 highlighted that they needed more volunteers for this vital community service.

The Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association¹⁸ is an example of a diverse program of activities, centred on engagement for physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, and keeping people connected socially, tailored to community members' needs and interests. Volunteers are diverse aged cohorts and work on site and assist with digital tasks such as the creation and updating of websites and social media platforms.

The Townsville Region Committee on the Ageing (TRCOTA)¹⁹ is an example of a volunteer organisation dedicated to championing the rights, needs, and interests of older people. Their executive members work with community groups, government agencies, and private organisations to drive positive change through advocacy and research. Members participate in monthly meetings to voice their concerns and stay informed, and they also provide vital referrals and key information for older adults navigating life changes and seeking supports.

Council on the Ageing Queensland runs an *Energy4Seniors* program²⁰ in response to the cost-of-living pressures and knowing that food, utilities and energy-related expenses make up a significant proportion of regular household expenditure. The *Energy4Seniors* program uses local volunteer 'Energy Champions' to provide older people with information, tips, and ideas to make wise choices about energy usage.

The Queensland government has highlighted volunteering in the Queensland Seniors Action Plan 2024 – 2026²¹ including projects that recognise and support volunteers and their workforce sustainability. For example, in partnership with Volunteering Queensland who identified barriers to volunteering and developed tailored approaches to increase awareness and opportunities for older adults in their local communities, a new campaign was recently launched in January 2025, *Seniors Volunteering*.²² As part of this campaign, there is information and resources for

¹⁴ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024*. [Research/industry report]. <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2024-report/>

¹⁵ Brisbane Seniors Online (BSOL) website: <https://bsol.asn.au/>

¹⁶ Gold Coast Seniors on the Net website: <https://goldcoastsotn.com.au/>

¹⁷ Circle of Men Inc website: <https://circleofmenqld.com/>

¹⁸ The Cairns and District Senior Citizens Association (CDSCA) website: <https://www.cairnsseniors.com.au/>

¹⁹ The Townsville Region Committee on the Ageing (TRCOTA) website: <https://www.trcota.com/>

²⁰ The *Energy4Seniors* program received grant funding from the Queensland Government as part of the Enable Grants Program.

²¹ Queensland Government. (2024). *Queensland Seniors Action Plan 2024 – 2026*. The Action Plan can be read in conjunction with the Seniors Strategy – Queensland Government. (2024). *An Age-Friendly Queensland: The Queensland Seniors Strategy 2024 – 2029*. https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/seniors/queensland-seniors-strategy-2024-2029.pdf
https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/seniors/queensland-seniors-action-plan-2024-2026.pdf

²² The Seniors Volunteering Campaign website: <https://vq.volunteeringqld.org.au/seniorsvolunteering/>

older people wishing to become volunteers and who are searching for volunteer work, and guidance for service providers and organisations wishing to equip themselves with inclusive practices, engagement strategies, and access training and support materials.

The Queensland government also acknowledged the delivery of programs that support active engagement of older adults in arts and cultural activities (as participants, artists and audience) to support life-long learning and health and wellbeing. For example, through Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) and Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) programs, older adults are supported to actively engage through Access Programs and Volunteer Guiding Programs.²³

The Queensland government also provides information and resources online,²⁴ which highlights volunteer resource centres in specific regions (we note these centres are not available in all regions of Queensland), types of volunteer work, and legal information including workplace health and safety considerations.

A further example is the continued commitment to the mitigation and prevention of social isolation through the funding of seniors' activity programs through more than 60 organisations across the state.²⁵ Many of these organisations are run with part-time staff and rely on volunteer workforces, providing an invaluable service to their communities through cultivating and maintaining physical and mental health and wellbeing, and providing vital information, referrals and support.

Insights from 2021 to 2024

We have heard through our community engagements and survey consultations from 2021 - 2024²⁶ that older volunteers are crucial to the functioning and sustainability of many organisations and are often the backbone of community advocacy, services and initiatives.

Queensland volunteers have told us over the past four years the diversity of roles they undertake in caring and connecting, such as informal care provision, aged care volunteer, assisting with hospitals and community care services, faith based groups or organisations, meal deliveries, literacy and numeracy with younger people, advocates and representatives for specific causes (usually through having lived experience of being in a support role or being the individual in need of supports), and supporting fundraising or awareness raising for multiple community groups (e.g., intergenerational activities and groups including formal clubs, specific interest groups, assisting with administration and funding opportunities).

²³ Of note also is the Art and Dementia Program for people living with dementia and their carer supports psychosocial wellbeing.

²⁴ Queensland Government. (2025). *Volunteering*. [Resource webpage]. <https://www.qld.gov.au/community/community-organisations-volunteering/volunteering>

²⁵ A listing of current Seniors Social Isolation programs is provided through the Queensland government site: <https://www.qld.gov.au/seniors/recreation-staying-connected/social-connection-leisure/staying-connected-your-community>

²⁶ Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2021). *Social Isolation survey*. [Internal dataset]. Survey designed to inform the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness.

Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2023). *Listening Post 2022 Final Report*. Prepared for the Department of Seniors, Disability Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. [Internal report, January 2023].

Council on the Ageing Queensland (2023). *Programs for Older People survey. Initial insights*. [Internal research report]. Report prepared for Queensland state government.

Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2024). *Re-imagining Ageing. Regional Forums report October 2023 – June 2024*. Prepared for the Department of Child Safety, Seniors, and Disability Services. [Internal report, July 2024]

Volunteering offers flexibility, autonomy, opportunities for social connection while maintaining mental and physical health, and maintaining identity and sense of purpose, especially during transitions such as retirement or stepping into or out of caregiving roles. It can combat social isolation through intergenerational interactions, fostering personal growth, creativity, provide stability and fulfilment, and strengthen community ties. Volunteering empowers people to contribute to the sustainability of organisations and groups using their rich experience and expertise (sometimes, they also bring their mentorship, social connections and networking).

However, many face challenges such as transportation limitations in all regions but especially in outer regional, rural and more remote areas, which hinder access to opportunities particularly when community members cease driving. For organisations and groups, recruiting younger and older volunteers is also a challenge, as work and family commitments reduce their availability, creating gaps in workforce participation, and some older adults feel a sense of obligation in carrying on a volunteering commitment despite experiencing fatigue. Additionally, some older individuals prefer to not take on unpaid roles during their retirement. Administrative barriers including complex paperwork, police/blue card/similar checks, and management structures can sometimes lead to frustration and feelings of exclusion. The use of professional jargon or inflexible communication can leave volunteers feeling undervalued or isolated, contributing to burnout. Ageism and outdated regulations, along with the lingering impacts of the pandemic, have been disruptive and made it difficult to maintain a volunteer network in some regions.

Despite the challenges, volunteer contributions are highly valued, but visibility and recognition of their work is key to ensuring continued engagement. People thrive when they feel appreciated (regardless of the volunteer role they step into). Volunteering sustains and builds resilience in age-friendly communities but also through civic participation and social inclusion, benefits the wellbeing of volunteers themselves.

A large, dark blue triangle pointing downwards, occupying the right half of the page. It serves as a background for the text.

Current insights

**Older adult &
community
perspectives**

Current Insights - 2025

Council on the Ageing Queensland conducted two online surveys from January – February 2025 to inform the current submission - one survey from older adult and community perspectives,²⁷ and a second survey from service providers and community organisation perspectives.²⁸

Older adult and community perspectives

State of volunteering for older Queenslanders

Forty-six older adults completed the survey with the highest percentage being those adults aged between 60 - 79 years (35% aged 60 - 69 years, 35% aged 70 - 79 years), followed by 17% aged 80 - 89 years, and 2% aged 90 years and over. Many respondents identified as female at 70%, and 30% as male.²⁹

Of the 46 respondents, just over half (53%) volunteered on a weekly basis, 15% volunteered monthly, 11% volunteered occasionally, and 2% never.

Potential or future volunteers

Twenty percent responded that they do not currently volunteer but would like to become a volunteer. The types of volunteer work that these respondents were interested in included:

- Administration (e.g., with State Emergency Services or Rural Fire Brigades)
- Creative arts and culture
- Homeless services
- Education (e.g., literacy and numeracy with students; working with very young and younger generations)
- Environment (e.g., land care)
- Anything to do with teamwork
- Community supports and care services (e.g., aged care assisting or accompanying people)
- Online service support
- Any area where skills and lived experience could be utilised.

Current volunteers

Older volunteers undertake diverse work and roles. The respondents that were already volunteering indicated the areas they contributed to, with the top-rated area being community services at 29%, followed by health and aged care, education and training, and environmental conservation (all at 11% each). Ten percent worked in arts and culture, 5% in sports and recreation, 4% in emergency services and disaster management, 3% in animal welfare, and tourism, homeless services, and meal services (all at 1% each).

²⁷ Council on the Ageing Queensland. (2025). *Older Queenslanders and volunteering*. [Online survey dataset].

²⁸ Council on the Ageing Queensland (2025). *Older People and volunteering in Queensland*. [Online survey dataset].

²⁹ No respondents identified as a preferred or tertiary gender.

Twelve percent of respondents indicated 'other', and they described these areas as:

- Championing for community and opportunities with participation through clubs or organisations such as Rotary, Probus, University of the Third Age (U3A) (roles were diverse including e.g., advocacy, craft activity coordination/host, state representation, directors of boards, tutoring)
- Faith based/religious groups or communities (including administrative work)
- Charitable organisations (e.g., retail arms of charities e.g., op-shops)
- Museums
- Retirement villages (including leadership and operational or practical roles)
- Disability organisations
- Community development (e.g., coordination of community markets)
- Online work (e.g., administration, mapping exercises)
- Advocacy
- Any activities in the community related to older adults.
- There was also interest in becoming a volunteer for care organisations as a volunteer companion or visitor, but potential volunteers were put off by the 'red tape'.

For older adult volunteers, the **primary benefits** they experienced in their current roles included contribution to the community (21%), personal satisfaction and reward (20%), and social connections (20%). This was followed closely by beneficial to mental health and wellbeing (19%), then physical health and wellbeing (9%), skill development (7%), in kind contributions (4%), and then 'other' (1%). 'Other' included work like mentoring and education (e.g., course preparation). One respondent indicated that maintaining contact and relationships with friends was a specific social connective benefit of volunteering.

The **primary difficulties** experienced by older volunteers included regulations and 'red tape' (13%), cost in the time taken to volunteer with juggling other commitments (12%), and cost or process involved with administration (such as police checks, blue cards, etc.) (11%), and time constraints (also at 11%). Rated less by community but still impactful was poor management of volunteer staff (10%), administrative processes (9%), cost incurred from travel (9%), and lack of opportunities (6%). Other areas indicated by respondents included transport (5%), lack of recognition as a volunteer (5%), and lack of support or training (5%), insufficient resources (3%), and confidence (2%).

Older adults also told us about additional difficulties they experienced or observed:

- Mobility and health challenges due to physical limitations, highlighting the need for more accessible and inclusive roles.
- Inflexibility and lack of follow-through from organisations who utilise a volunteer workforce including failure to follow through on volunteer opportunities, and time commitment requirement not aligning with potential volunteers' personal schedules.

- Family commitments, responsibilities and irregular schedules, in addition to caregiving roles, can make regular commitment to volunteering a challenge.
- Lack of understanding around consumer engagement and representation in volunteering roles.
- Cultural and social issues such as racism and the emotional impact were mentioned as creating barriers to volunteering.
- Intergenerational understanding with respondents mentioning that younger generations were less involved, and they felt like older volunteers carry the burden.
- Poor volunteer management practices and lack of appreciation lead to dissatisfaction with existing volunteers.
- Volunteers often find their roles mismatched with their skills and preferences.
- Poor communication between volunteer management and volunteers' needs or preferences.
- Service clubs, and emergency response services, face an ageing volunteer base, and fewer people are volunteering overall.
- One respondent wished to promote effective integration and safety in the workplace, and part of this was everyone speaking a common language. This suggestion comes against the backdrop of Australia's rich linguistic diversity, which can sometimes hinder clear communication and understanding.
- Feedback from long-term volunteers highlighted:
 - A lack of acknowledgment for contributions in official meeting records.
 - Overuse of professional jargon and acronyms that leave some volunteers confused and under-informed.
 - An imbalance in preparation and briefing between professional members and volunteers, leading to feelings of intimidation.
 - A sense of isolation, as some volunteers feel like outsiders in an environment where "everyone else knows each other."
 - A perception that their input is disregarded, which was noted as discouraging given the significant personal effort and expense (including long travel distances) involved in their participation.

Respondents **shared their ideas about what could be done to decrease or eliminate difficulties** which broadly include better volunteer management practices, more flexibility in volunteer roles, recognition of volunteers' unique contributions, and reducing administrative processes to cultivate a more productive and positive experience for volunteers. Specific examples mentioned were:

- Respect and recognition of volunteer contributions and that they are acknowledged for their lived experience, unique skillsets, and work or professional experiences they bring to a role (rather than viewed as free labour).
- Management and support such as trained and skilled volunteer coordinators, appropriate training for both volunteers and their managers, and open communication between volunteers and coordinators. Additionally, managers need to understand the

specific needs of volunteers including age and physical considerations and be able to provide guidance (and encourage volunteers to ask questions, encouragement of self-care practices, and debriefing in certain situations or circumstances).

- Flexibility and adaptability in volunteering arrangements and scheduling, so that roles or work can be accommodated to existing lifestyles and commitments.
- Inclusive community and workspaces so accessibility and mobility considerations are taken into account and lessened as a barrier for participation.
- Engagement and retention through effective engagement to prevent volunteers becoming disengaged (or sometimes termed 'less reliable'). There is a potential to incentivise volunteers with benefits like tax concessions.
- Improving volunteer systems through simplifying volunteer-related processes, reducing paperwork, bureaucracy, reducing some of the reliance on digital devices (phones, for example), and decreasing regulations. Additionally, streamlining the number of organisations offering similar services may improve efficiency.
- Tailored training and orientation based on the volunteer's previous experience and current level of knowledge, with managers and coordinators trained to manage volunteer and oversee training and orientation.
- Role clarification to ensure that volunteers are given appropriate tasks and are not overwhelmed with unnecessary administrative work.
- Management and allocation of resources such as ensuring car spaces/parking, carpooling, serviced facilities and reducing inefficiencies in community space usage.
- Reimbursement or compensation for volunteer-related costs.
- Motivation and commitment with better alignment between volunteer work and personal interests balanced with life constraints. Volunteers should not be treated like employees and should be motivated by their passion, not financial incentives.
- Organisations may need to address workload distribution, provide flexibility, and offer recognition and support to prevent burnout and enhance engagement.

Further, **older volunteers explained the main motivators for them** were personal interest (30%) and community needs (30%), followed by social connections (31%). Four percent indicated they undertook volunteering for professional development, and 3% for legacy reasons. Approximately 7% of respondents described another reason for what motivates them to volunteer. These included things like:

- Aged care and policy concerns (including tackling big picture issues like ageism)
- Intellectual and personal fulfillment, sense of purpose (including cognitive benefits and maintaining a sense of meaning and purpose)
- Self-growth and personal rewards (including self-esteem, fulfilling a life purpose, altruistic motivations intertwined with personal growth)
- External motivations or requirements (including Centrelink mandates, job agencies)

- Recognition of lived experience, professional or work expertise and ongoing utilisation of life or personal skills (including feeling valued by others).

Communities shared what would help improve their or others' experiences of volunteering

and respondents placed an emphasis on good management, better training, clear communication, reduced bureaucracy, and the provision of a supportive environment for older adult volunteers. Specifically:

- Take volunteer management seriously and ensure proper staff training.
- Volunteers who manage programs should be better supported, especially in administrative work.
- Ensure clear communication and provide more training and support for volunteers.
- Reduce excessive red tape and government interference to allow for more effective volunteering.
- Streamline processes to make collaboration with government bodies easier.
- Call for more government support and actions that moves beyond discussion.
- Relax Centrelink obligations to make volunteering a choice, not a requirement.
- Provide better training, preparation, and clearer expectations for volunteers.
- Ensure that volunteers understand their roles before committing.
- Empower volunteers and build confidence and ensure they feel valued.
- Ensure that volunteer work is meaningful and appreciated.
- Involve volunteers in decision-making to ensure their needs are understood and addressed.
- Address issues like transport limitations that affect where and how volunteers can contribute.
- Promote volunteering as a voluntary activity rather than something driven by external obligations.
- More paid staff should be involved in administrative tasks, especially for complex volunteer roles
- Frontline and middle management should be trained in HR and management skills to support volunteers.
- Volunteers need to feel that their efforts are making a positive impact on the community and its members.

Communities further shared their thoughts regarding **diversity in volunteering**. Over half of respondents (52%) believed that there were unique challenges for volunteers from diverse backgrounds (39% believed may there were unique challenges, and 9% believed that there were not unique challenges for volunteers from diverse backgrounds).

Challenges that people reflected upon (that volunteers from diverse backgrounds experience) included language (one of most frequently mentioned challenges for diverse volunteers),

culture, discrimination and exclusion, a lack of understanding and support from organisations, volunteer confidence and integration, accessibility considerations and practical barriers, lack of opportunities and invitations, social and interpersonal challenges, misinformation and perceptions, and impact of family and personal obligations. Some specific examples provided were:

- Difficulties in comprehension, expression, and communication in English.
- Challenges in understanding cultural nuances, differing work ethics, and expectations.
- Some respondents highlighted experiences of being perceived as “different,” feeling isolated, or facing discrimination, particularly for First Nations people.
- Organisations may not fully grasp the unique challenges faced by diverse volunteers or provide adequate training and support.
- Volunteers may struggle with self-confidence, social codes, or fear of being accepted within established volunteer groups or “cliques.”
- Challenges related to physical, financial, or logistical accessibility.
- Some respondents noted that volunteers from diverse backgrounds are not always actively recruited or prepared adequately for roles.
- Issues like difficulty connecting with groups, understanding workplace conventions, and lack of social cohesion.
- Some challenges arise from misunderstandings or incorrect perceptions that diverse volunteers may have about others.
- For some, personal and family responsibilities (e.g., kin carers) are not always considered by organisations.

Respondents told us about **how volunteering could be made more accessible and inclusive** so all community members would feel supported in their volunteering work. Some of their key suggestions and ideas focused on education, training, raising awareness, creating a more supportive environment, addressing practical barriers, better outreach and promotion, instilling respect and having individualised support, and working towards addressing the social and systemic challenges. Specifically, this looked like:

- Regular workshops and training for both volunteers and staff to improve cultural competencies, communication techniques, and awareness of biases.
- Comprehensive induction courses for new volunteers.
- Mentorship programs and one-on-one training to support diverse volunteers.
- Encouraging open-minded leadership, ensuring those managing volunteers are adaptable and welcoming.
- Promoting diversity through acknowledgment and recognition of individual contributions.
- Implementing a ‘buddy’ system to help new volunteers feel included and supported.

- Providing accessibility support for individuals with mobility challenges, neurodivergence, or language barriers.
- Reducing bureaucratic hurdles (“less red tape”) to make volunteering easier.
- Ensuring digital accessibility for older volunteers or those unfamiliar with technology.
- Advertising volunteering opportunities through community meetings, religious groups, libraries, and other local hubs.
- Actively encouraging diverse individuals to participate.
- Placing volunteers in like-minded communities to ease integration.
- Recognising that diversity means different needs for different individuals - there is no one-size-fits-all approach.
- Creating spaces for regular check-ins and listening to volunteer concerns.
- Considering why diverse individuals may want to volunteer (e.g., social connection, integration, overcoming isolation).
- Tackling issues like discrimination within volunteer environments.
- Ensuring that volunteers feel valued, wanted, and respected.
- Understanding and incorporating individual interests into volunteer roles.

In addition, approximately 15% of respondents indicated they found **current government volunteering support** effective (4% very effective, 11% effective). Fifty-nine percent felt neutral about the efficacy of government supports for volunteering, and 26% indicated that it was ineffective (22% ineffective, 4% very ineffective).

Respondents put forward the following **ideas, recommendations or suggestions to improve government support for volunteering**:

- Shift away from viewing volunteers as free labor and instead recognise their contributions.
- Establish formal recognition programs to celebrate and appreciate volunteers.
- Promote the benefits of volunteering more effectively to encourage participation.
- Simplify application processes (e.g., making it easier to obtain blue cards).
- Minimise excessive red tape and unnecessary online training that discourages participation, especially for older or diverse volunteers.
- Balance government requirements with a more human approach to managing volunteers.
- Provide consistent funding for volunteer programs, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Offer financial incentives to offset volunteer costs, recognising that volunteers save governments millions.

- Support organisations with grants, insurance coverage, and essential resources (e.g., laptops, tools, and equipment).
- Fund paid volunteer coordinators who understand the sector.
- Ensure transport assistance for volunteers, especially those who struggle with mobility or financial constraints.
- Make sure volunteering opportunities are available across all ages and backgrounds.
- Establish a complaints line to address exploitation or mistreatment of volunteers.
- Launch public awareness campaigns to encourage volunteer participation.
- Promote volunteering through community networks and wider consultation with organisations beyond just the usual groups.
- Support the recruitment, retention, and orientation of volunteers through dedicated management.

Many respondents had ideas, suggestions and recommendations for **opportunities for local communities and councils** for older adults and volunteering, and **how the state government could leverage the 2032 Olympics and Paralympic Games to support older adults and volunteering**. What came out strongly from responses were inclusive and accessible opportunities, provision of practical support, raising awareness, focus on recruitment, recognition and legacy, and addressing concerns and challenges. Specifically:

- Ensure volunteering roles are inclusive of all ages and offer positions suited to older adults.
- Provide training and skills development for all volunteers, regardless of age.
- Assign volunteers to sites closest to their homes to reduce travel burden.
- Offer shorter, flexible shifts to accommodate physical limitations.
- Provide roles that require minimal physical strain (e.g., ambassador roles, guides, information support).
- Improve public transport access and offer transport or accommodation support for regional and rural volunteers.
- Provide shaded areas, hydration stations, and rest spots to ensure volunteer comfort.
- Offer reimbursement or allowances for travel and meals to support participation.
- Create a website or database listing all available volunteer opportunities.
- Advertise widely across communities to ensure people know how to get involved.
- Recognize and utilize the existing skills and experience of older adults in meaningful roles.
- Promote Volunteering Queensland's role in organizing and supporting volunteers.
- Ensure volunteers are properly recognized and celebrated, similar to the approach taken in Paris 2024.
- Develop legacy projects that continue to benefit older adults beyond the Games.
- Collaborate with organizations supporting older adults (e.g., COTA) to create structured volunteering opportunities.
- Some respondents feel disinterested in the Games or believe volunteering does not belong in the Olympics.

- Others express concerns about age limitations by 2032, suggesting that long-term planning should consider the aging volunteer population.
- Learn from previous experiences (e.g., Commonwealth Games) to ensure volunteers are valued and not sidelined.

Communities also had diverse ideas, suggestions and recommendations around **opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering** which included improving awareness and recruitment processes, attraction and retention of volunteers, expansion of roles beyond frontline work, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and strengthening community engagement. Specifically, this looked like:

- Awareness campaigns and clearer communication about how to get involved are needed (the nature of the work, diversity of work, and its requirements).
- Schools and universities were suggested as key recruitment points, offering education sessions for students to introduce them to volunteering.
- Encouragement of older volunteers to promote opportunities to younger people within their networks.
- Offering incentives (e.g., skill recognition for employment, financial compensation, or tax benefits).
- Promotion of the social and skill-building benefits of emergency volunteering, particularly for younger people.
- Develop corporate volunteering programs and government-supported initiatives.
- Recognise and reward emergency volunteers to foster long-term engagement.
- Many potential volunteers are not physically able or willing to engage in demanding fieldwork like firefighting or roof repairs.
- Increase opportunities for administrative, planning, logistics, and support roles, particularly for older individuals.
- Engage volunteers in meal preparation, communications, training, and community coordination during emergencies.
- Red tape and excessive requirements (e.g., Blue Cards for certain roles) discourage potential volunteers.
- Streamline enrolment and approval processes to make it easier to sign up and contribute.
- Avoid centralised government interference in well-functioning local emergency groups.
- Start at the local level by identifying interested volunteers and assessing community needs.
- Foster a stronger sense of community among volunteers through networking and local engagement.
- Ensure better communication and coordination so volunteers know how and where they can help.

In relation to **First Nations communities and how older volunteers can be better supported especially in rural and remote areas**, respondents shared their thoughts and suggestions highlighting respect, recognition, and cultural understanding, and strengthening community-led approaches, increasing accessibility and practical supports, awareness, education and inclusion, and encouragement of multigenerational volunteering. Specifically:

- Recognise and respect First Nations communities, ensuring that volunteering efforts align with their needs and priorities.
- Acknowledge historical injustices and address ongoing discrimination to create more inclusive opportunities.
- Provide training for volunteers to ensure they understand and respect First Nations cultural practices and traditions.
- Engage First Nations mentors to help guide and support volunteers, fostering mutual trust and understanding.
- Listen to and involve First Nations people in shaping volunteer programs rather than imposing external solutions.
- Where possible, prioritize First Nations volunteers for roles within their own communities.
- Support self-organized community-led initiatives rather than bringing in external groups that may not align with local needs.
- Base volunteering efforts on community-driven projects that match both the skills of volunteers and the priorities of First Nations communities.
- Provide reliable transport to and from volunteering locations, particularly in remote areas.
- Offer flexible volunteering options, including virtual opportunities (e.g., Zoom mentoring) to bridge urban and rural communities.
- Increase funding and resources for volunteer programs in First Nations communities.
- Run awareness campaigns to educate the wider community on the needs of First Nations people and the role of volunteers.
- Facilitate information-sharing through newsletters, meetings, and visits to First Nations communities.
- Advocate for government policies that support First Nations volunteering and address the specific challenges faced by older adults in remote areas.
- Motivate younger generations to engage in volunteering and support older volunteers.
- Consider pairing older volunteers with younger participants to encourage knowledge-sharing and mentorship.
- Promote social inclusion activities to strengthen relationships between First Nations communities and the broader population.

Additional and general comments and suggestions from respondents included recognition and valuing of older volunteers, addressing participation barriers, increasing and sustaining volunteer engagement, and the future of volunteering. Specifically:

- Many older adults feel their skills and knowledge are underutilised and not actively sought after. Volunteers should be respected for their expertise rather than assumed to only be suited for traditional roles like meal delivery.
- Opportunities should be tailored to individual interests, experience, and abilities, rather than being dictated by age.
- Some older adults are managing their own care needs, which reduces their ability to volunteer. Improved home care support could enable greater participation.
- Many older women care for grandchildren, particularly during school holidays. If Queensland wants more older women to volunteer, childcare affordability and access must be considered.
- Some older adults did not grow up with modern technology, but many are willing and able to learn if supported. Volunteering should accommodate varying levels of digital literacy.
- Restricted weekend public transport reduces volunteering opportunities for some. More weekend volunteering roles could help combat loneliness.
- Bringing together younger and older volunteers can foster mutual learning, mentorship, and social connection.
- Some potential volunteers are interested but find it too difficult to get involved. The process needs to be simplified and better promoted.
- Volunteers of all ages need training, recognition, and support, including covering costs incurred in their roles.
- Volunteers should not be left alone to open or close facilities, and fit-for-purpose roles should be available based on their abilities.
- Volunteer numbers declined in some regions due to the pandemic, and many older volunteers have not returned. The sector needs to rebuild engagement efforts.
- Some fear that once 'Baby Boomers' stop volunteering, numbers will decline further unless younger people are recruited.
- The perception that only young people should volunteer in physically demanding roles should be balanced with recognition of older volunteers' diverse contributions.

A large, dark blue triangle pointing downwards, occupying the right half of the page. It contains the text 'Current insights' in white and 'Service provider & community organisation perspectives' in orange.

Current insights
**Service provider
& community
organisation
perspectives**

Service provider and community organisation perspectives

We also surveyed service providers and communication organisations for their perspectives of older volunteers and volunteer workforces in Queensland. We received **14 responses from service providers and community organisations** and this included community services (12%), social isolation prevention (18%), neighbourhood or community centres (16%), crisis assistance (with housing, clothing, meals, protection from mistreatment or abuse) (11%), Commonwealth Home Support Programme (8%), community and/or aged care (including home care) (5%), primary health care or allied health care services (3%), advocacy (individual or systemic) (3%), policy and research (3%), and legal services (3%). Of the 4% that indicated another type of service offering, these were reported as social or recreational activity groups or programs, cultural and historic societies, faith-based communities, or supporting other community groups through provision of equipment, bursaries, and programs.

Service providers and community organisations were based in the following regions:

- Nationwide (Queensland and other states or territories) - 15%
- Statewide (Queensland) - 5%
- Central Queensland – 15%
- Darling Downs Southwest – 15%
- Far North Queensland – 5%
- Southeast Queensland – North – 15%
- Southeast Queensland – South – 10%
- Southeast Queensland – West – 10%
- Wide Bay Burnett – Fraser Coast and Gympie – 10%.³⁰

These **fourteen providers and organisations were diverse and had between 0 and 20+ volunteers in their teams**. Forty-three percent had more than 20 volunteers in their teams, 14% 11 – 15, another 14% had 6 – 10, 7% had 1 – 5, and another 7% had 16 – 20 volunteers. Fourteen percent (or two organisations/providers) did not have volunteers currently but would like to have volunteers on their teams.

In an ideal situation (where there would be no resource limitations) providers and organisations told us how many volunteers they would need right now. This included:

- 50% of respondents needed 20 or more volunteers
- 14% needed 1 – 5 volunteers
- 14% needed 6 – 10 volunteers
- 14% needed 11 – 15 volunteers
- 7% needed 16 – 20 volunteers.

³⁰ There were no respondents (reported) from the following regions: Mackay Isaac Whitsunday; North Queensland; Northwest Queensland; Wide Bay Burnett – Bundaberg and Burnett.

Volunteers play a vital role in strengthening community connections and contributing to essential services across Queensland. From respondents, we learnt that **volunteers contribute to diverse roles** such as program coordination and social activities including wellbeing programs such as Tai Chi, community choir, seniors' groups, and advocacy initiatives. They also undertook community centre and administrative support including front desk, IT assistance, resource development, and general administration and processes. In keeping others connected, they undertook companionship and lifestyle support such as companion volunteers, activity facilitators, and support for individuals and families. They were also creative in undertaking media and content creation including writing and editing historic information (and stories), managing websites and social media, and promoting organisations through local media. They did practical roles such as transport and outreach such as transport drivers, home visits, and assistance with church services. They undertook event and market coordination including supporting local markets, organising exhibits/stalls, and assisting with events. They also maintained facilities including gardening, maintaining grounds, buildings, and assisting with community lunches.

Further, providers and organisations told us about the **qualities, benefits, and opportunities that volunteers bring to their local communities**. It was clear that volunteers played critical (and sometimes irreplaceable) roles and were valued by organisations and providers and the wider community. Specifically, this was through:

- Sustaining organisations and services with some respondents reporting that they could not operate or would struggle to function without volunteers, particularly self-funded clubs, aged care facilities, and community groups.
- Enhancing community connections particularly bridging the gaps between different groups, fostering social inclusion, companionship, and support for older adults, people with disabilities, and those at risk of or living in isolation.
- Preserving and promoting local culture through capturing and sharing local history, boosting community identity and enhancing tourism appeal of region or community.
- Reducing costs and expanding services through contributing their time, volunteers reduce financial burdens, allowing organisations to offer more services, especially in aged care and community outreach.
- Strengthening social wellbeing through combatting loneliness and isolation, particularly for older adults, by providing friendly visits, social activities, and meaningful engagement.
- Supporting community groups through contributing to multiple organisations, such as Lions Clubs, Scouts, State Emergency Services (SES), and Meals on Wheels, creating a ripple effect of generosity and support across communities.
- Economic and practical support through advice and their professional skills, operational support, and fundraising assistance, helping to sustain community programs, fund essential services, and support local businesses.

Ultimately, volunteers were described as essential to thriving communities, bringing humanity, lived experience, and connection to everything they do. Conversely, volunteers gained diverse benefits from being involved with service providers and organisations.

From service provider and community organisation perspectives, **volunteers gained many personal, social and professional benefits through their contributions**, enriching their own lives and the communities they contribute to; specifically, they gained a deep sense of purpose, satisfaction, self-worth, and achievement from making a difference in others' lives. They also experienced new friendships, social interaction and connection, and a sense of belonging, helping to build strong support networks. They cultivated valuable skills and knowledge such as digital literacy, financial management, communication, leadership, and cultural awareness. Further, through community engagement and connection, there were opportunities for volunteers to contribute ideas, support local initiatives, and engage in meaningful discussions about the future. It was also observed that volunteers are exposed to different cultures and perspectives through e.g., gaining insight from older generations, diverse communities, and different cultural backgrounds, including the Deaf community and Indigenous history. It was also observed that volunteers were sometimes participating to meet their job-seeking obligations or achieving vocational goals while others naturally felt a sense of vocation and service in their work.

It was key to have ongoing recognition and appreciation for their contributions with many organisations having reward and recognition programs, offering thank-you events, appreciation gifts, and ongoing acknowledgment.

Respondents further shared the profound impact that volunteering has had on the wellbeing of older adults and communities, cultivating connection, emotional support, and enhanced services, especially for community services, sports clubs, and events which rely on volunteers, making them essential to maintaining vibrant and active communities. Volunteers provide companionship and social interaction, particularly for those in aged care or living alone, helping to improve mental and emotional wellbeing. Further, they empower individuals by assisting with daily activities, transportation, and participation in community programs, helping many remain independent in their own homes. Volunteers enable people to communicate in their preferred language, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion, especially within diverse communities, and organisations with volunteers can quickly adapt and respond to individual needs, building trust and strong relationships with those they support. Volunteers create friendships, a sense of connection, and opportunities for healing, especially in aged care settings where they may be the only visitor a person sees all week. Respondents also said that many organisations would not survive without volunteers, as funding is often insufficient to hire paid staff for all necessary roles.

Providers and organisations also face **growing challenges in attracting and retaining volunteers**, with several key barriers emerging including many organisations reporting that fewer people, especially younger generations, are stepping into volunteer roles, leading to an ageing volunteer workforce. Potential volunteers feel time-poor due to work, family responsibilities, and busy schedules, making it difficult to commit. Some people hesitate to volunteer due to lack of confidence, uncertainty about how to get involved, or reluctance to take on responsibility. Some believe certain volunteer roles should be paid positions, while others

fear emotional challenges, particularly in aged care or health-related settings. In addition, organisations struggle to attract younger volunteers and may lack strategies to engage diverse groups, such as the Deaf community, who require accessible onboarding and training. Additional challenges were limited options for transport, financial concerns, and volunteers 'ageing out' or prioritising travel and leisure over volunteer interests which contribute to declining numbers.

Respondents also shared their thoughts on **legislative and regulatory requirements for volunteering**. For many organisations, legislative and regulatory requirements have a minimal impact on their ability to recruit and manage volunteers. However, some challenges do arise. Police checks, compliance paperwork, and onboarding procedures can deter potential volunteers, particularly those who prefer to help on an ad-hoc basis. Older volunteers who are not computer-literate may struggle with digital forms, creating additional administrative burdens. Some organisations, especially smaller ones, find that excessive induction and compliance requirements discourage participation compared to more flexible, informal approaches. Additionally, costs associated with compliance, insurance, and volunteer management can strain resources. While most organisations understand the importance of workplace health and safety, child protection, and safeguarding vulnerable people, navigating evolving regulations and cultural differences can sometimes present challenges.

In relation to other **restrictions that limit volunteer engagement**, most organisations indicated they did not experience significant restrictions. However, in some cases, compliance requirements such as Blue Cards (Working with Children checks) and additional paperwork (e.g., informed consent forms) can hinder volunteer engagement. Some individuals may be reluctant to complete these processes, leading to their exclusion from certain roles. Additionally, administrative burdens, including the time required to process volunteer paperwork and manage compliance, can be a challenge. A few organisations note that they lack the capacity to run a structured volunteer program, as effective coordination would require dedicated staffing. There is also a preference among some volunteers for short-term, event-based roles rather than ongoing positions with responsibilities, such as serving on a board.

Providers and organisations highlighted that volunteer motivations included being driven by a strong sense of community, purpose, and connection. Many people volunteer to keep organisations running, ensuring clubs, groups, and services continue to operate. Social interaction, friendship, and a desire to stay mentally active are also key motivators. Some volunteers are inspired by personal experiences, such as caring for loved ones or wanting to support older community members. Others see volunteering as a way to give back, contribute their skills after paid employment, or fulfill a personal calling to serve. Recognition and appreciation play a role, as does the opportunity for professional development and engaging with topics of personal interest, such as history or local heritage. In some cases, volunteers participate to meet obligations, such as Centrelink or Job Seeker requirements. Ultimately, volunteers are motivated by a mix of personal fulfillment, social engagement, and commitment to their communities.

From the provider and organisation perspective, they felt that volunteers encountered several challenges in their roles, with time constraints being one of the most significant

barriers. Many volunteers struggle to balance their commitments to work, family, travel, and other obligations, making it difficult to sustain long-term engagement. Burnout is a major issue, as responsibilities often fall on a small group of dedicated individuals, leading to exhaustion and high turnover. Some volunteers face unrealistic expectations, with organisations or community members expecting them to take on more work than is fair for an unpaid role. Social integration challenges can also arise, as new volunteers may struggle to feel accepted, learn organisational culture, or find a sense of belonging. For some, health issues or financial burdens, such as the cost of insurance or travel expenses, create additional barriers to participation. In regional or rural areas, long travel distances and lack of reimbursement for transport costs further complicate volunteer engagement. Additionally, office dynamics or the pressure of taking on leadership roles (such as board positions) can discourage involvement.

By recognising contributions, providing meaningful roles, and ensuring flexibility, organisations can improve volunteer satisfaction and engagement, leading to stronger and more sustainable volunteer programs. **Service providers and community organisations recommended** specifically:

- Ensure volunteers feel valued by offering regular recognition, informal thank-yous, and structured appreciation initiatives such as 'Volunteer of the Month' awards or group lunches.
- Align volunteers with roles that suit their skills, interests, and expectations, providing clear position descriptions and onboarding processes to help them feel confident in their contributions.
- Create more diverse and adaptable volunteering opportunities, particularly to attract younger people and allow volunteers to participate in ways that fit their schedules and abilities. Some suggested providing opportunities for volunteering at major events that individuals already attend to help engage them in a meaningful yet flexible way.
- Volunteers should have a meaningful role in shaping programs and decisions, with clear feedback on how their contributions make a difference.
- Offer breaks, support systems, and flexible commitments to prevent burnout. Consider government-supported financial incentives for retired volunteers, such as exempting small payments from pension calculations.
- Provide dedicated funding for small, community-driven organisations that target specific needs, even if they do not have high volunteer volumes.
- Launch advertising and awareness initiatives to highlight the benefits of volunteering, encouraging more community members to get involved.
- Build an inclusive, caring, and friendly environment where volunteers feel comfortable, can debrief, learn from mistakes, and collaborate effectively.

Service providers and community organisations told us that **they support their volunteers in a variety of ways**. Organisations generally **express openness and inclusive attitudes toward volunteers from diverse backgrounds**, but experiences and levels of engagement vary. Some organisations actively support diversity by offering flexible approaches, pairing volunteers with others who share their first language, and providing additional training and support as needed.

Others take a bilingual approach, ensuring resources are accessible in English and Auslan, or actively engaging with specific cultural groups (examples provided in responses were Djiru communities, African communities, culturally and linguistically diverse, and Deaf communities).

However, several organisations note that they have few volunteers from diverse backgrounds, either due to a lack of engagement, role suitability, or limited outreach efforts. In some cases, volunteers with disabilities struggle to sustain long-term participation due to the nature of the work. There is also recognition that more culturally tailored training and outreach efforts could help improve participation from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

From provider and organisation observations, **volunteers encountered varied challenges based on age, gender, and abilities, which can impact their participation.** Older volunteers may struggle with technology, physical limitations, and transportation barriers, while younger people often face scheduling conflicts due to study, part-time work, and extracurricular commitments. Gender imbalance is evident in some sectors, with more women engaging in community service roles, while men are often limited to specific tasks like bus driving or BBQ duties. Limited availability of volunteer opportunities outside of weekdays makes it difficult for full-time workers to participate, and a lack of public transport restricts access for those who do not drive. Technology barriers also pose a challenge, particularly for older volunteers who may prefer traditional, hands-on roles over digital or administrative tasks. Additionally, volunteers with mobility or health challenges may find certain roles physically demanding.

Respondents implied that to support volunteers of all backgrounds, organisations may need to offer flexible scheduling, targeted outreach, and additional training and accessibility support to ensure inclusive and sustainable volunteer engagement. To enhance inclusion, organisations could focus on actively recruiting volunteers from underrepresented groups, offering tailored training, and ensuring culturally appropriate support and communication. Creating an environment where all volunteers feel valued and supported is key to fostering a diverse and thriving volunteer workforce.

There are **several opportunities to enhance participation and accessibility for volunteers from diverse backgrounds.** Welcoming and supporting new volunteers while ensuring that long-term volunteers feel valued and can retire on their own terms can create a more sustainable volunteer base. Offering flexible or part-time opportunities can help older volunteers balance their commitments, while mentorship programs and designated points of contact can provide guidance and support for new recruits. Some organisations have trialled weekend volunteering but found that competing commitments, such as family and sporting activities, remain a barrier. Increasing creativity and inclusivity in recruitment strategies, particularly in attracting youth and male volunteers, may help diversify participation. Improving accessibility and reducing physical labor can also make volunteering more inclusive for people with mobility challenges. Additionally, increased funding could support better training and engagement initiatives, making volunteering more appealing. Some organisations, such as Deaf Connect, are already developing community-driven programs that attract a mix of young and older participants. Finally, many potential volunteers prefer informal involvement rather than officially joining structured groups like Rotary or Meals on Wheels, highlighting the need for more casual and flexible participation options.

Overall, **state and local government support for volunteer recruitment and retention is perceived as minimal or ineffective by providers and organisations.** Several respondents report little to no involvement from government bodies, except when volunteers are needed for government-run events. Many organisations rely on their own networks to recruit volunteers and have not actively sought government support. However, some positive aspects were noted, such as improvements to the Blue Card application process through the online portal and annual Federal Volunteer Grants, which provide financial assistance. A local government seminar featuring Volunteering Queensland was found to be useful, but a follow-up with electronic resources would have increased its impact. While some organisations find local government support effective, most do not see significant assistance in volunteer recruitment or management efforts. To improve support, governments could increase engagement, provide more funding, and offer practical tools and follow-ups to better assist volunteer-driven organisations.

To enhance volunteer engagement and sustainability, **organisations and providers felt that governments at all levels could implement several key improvements** across volunteer incentivisation, greater recognition and appreciation, improved training and skills development, flexible funding, more community promotion of volunteering, and encouragement of retiree involvement. Specifically, the suggestions were:

- Introduce tax deductions, credits, or financial subsidies for individuals who volunteer a certain number of hours per year, making volunteering more accessible, especially for those with financial constraints.
- Expand funding eligibility to allow for volunteer appreciation events, social gatherings, and informal incentives (e.g., morning teas or outings) rather than restricting funds to training and equipment.
- Provide free or low-cost training in areas such as leadership, communication, and specialised fields (e.g., disaster response or social services) to enhance volunteer effectiveness.
- Encourage workplaces to offer two or more days of paid leave per year for volunteering, allowing more people to participate without financial strain.
- Make volunteer-related funding easier to access and more flexible, ensuring it meets the actual needs of volunteers and organisations.
- Improve local government involvement and communication with volunteer organisations, ensuring decisions are informed by genuine community consultation rather than tokenistic engagement.
- Governments should invest in public awareness campaigns, local seminars, and promotional initiatives to highlight the importance of volunteering and encourage greater participation.
- Develop policies to engage retirees and pensioners in volunteering, utilising their skills and experience to benefit community growth.

The **2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games present a unique opportunity** for the state government to promote and strengthen volunteering across Queensland. Organisations and providers suggested establishing long-term volunteering initiatives, attracting participation and creating a lasting culture of volunteerism in Queensland through the following suggestions:

- Establish a long-term volunteer initiative that extends beyond the Games, training and engaging volunteers for ongoing community service in various sectors.
- Use the Games as a platform to celebrate and thank volunteers, offering incentives such as free event tickets, public recognition, and exclusive experiences for dedicated volunteers.
- Consider requiring previous community volunteering experience for those wishing to volunteer at the Olympics, encouraging broader engagement in local volunteer programs.
- Launch community awareness campaigns, local seminars, and media stories to highlight the importance of volunteering and inspire more people to get involved.
- Develop a website or portal listing upcoming volunteering opportunities, making it easier for people to find roles before, during, and after the Games.
- Provide travel and accommodation support for volunteers from rural and remote areas, ensuring greater accessibility to Olympic-related volunteering opportunities.

Organisations and providers also provided their thoughts on the **opportunities to enhance emergency response volunteering**, though participation often depends on individual willingness to get involved. Some communities already have strong volunteer engagement in emergencies, with local State Emergency Service (SES) teams actively recruiting. However, barriers such as required training and certification can sometimes deter new volunteers.

To boost participation, free informational sessions and workshops could be organised to educate the community on emergency response roles and their importance, targeting schools, workplaces, and local groups. Additionally, offering professional development and competency-based training may attract younger volunteers looking to build practical skills.

For diverse and vulnerable communities, accessibility remains a challenge. Emergency situations can be particularly difficult for Deaf individuals, as Auslan-interpreted emergency information is often lacking. Increasing volunteer training in Auslan and ensuring inclusive communication strategies could improve emergency preparedness for the Deaf community.

Organisations express openness and a willingness to engage Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers, but actual participation varies (with some organisations reported limited or no current involvement from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers). **Some organisations actively collaborate with local First Nations communities**, such as through joint ventures with Djiru people or dedicated programs supporting Deaf individuals in First Nations communities. Others note that while Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers would be welcomed, many prefer to engage with existing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community groups rather than broader volunteer organisations.

For organisations with limited or no Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteer participation, there is recognition of the need to improve cultural safety and build stronger relationships with local First Nations groups. Ensuring culturally respectful engagement and understanding the specific needs and interests of Indigenous volunteers is key to fostering meaningful collaboration.

Some organisations encourage all community members to volunteer through structured programs, while others acknowledge that more effort is needed to create inclusive and

culturally empowering opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stakeholders can help determine what initiatives would be most beneficial and culturally appropriate.

For those people engaging with First Nations communities, they shared that **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers contribute invaluable cultural knowledge, leadership, and community support** across various sectors. They serve as committee members in sporting and community groups, youth workers, and consultants in cultural and historical projects. Some volunteers play an essential role in aged care, providing companionship and culturally appropriate support for Indigenous residents.

In some communities, First Nations Elders take on advisory roles, such as acting as Cultural Advisors to ensure programs are inclusive and respectful. Their **contributions help strengthen relationships, foster cultural understanding, and enhance program effectiveness**.

Additionally, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers act as key connectors for other First Nations people, increasing visibility and engagement within community initiatives.

Respondents implied that there are opportunities to expand engagement by creating culturally safe volunteering spaces and tailored programs that align with community interests and needs.

Additionally, respondents explained how **volunteering can significantly contribute to initiatives that support and sustain First Nations communities** by fostering collaboration, cultural understanding, and community empowerment. Volunteers can play a role in mentoring, skill-building, and relationship development, provide practical assistance, raise awareness, and help to strengthen confidence, resilience, and community connections.

Respondents also relayed that by **working alongside First Nations communities and ensuring their inclusion in programs, volunteers help promote shared learning**, respect, and meaningful contributions. Additionally, volunteering can create opportunities for people to work together for the common good, leading to a stronger sense of commitment, achievement, and community satisfaction. Expanding volunteer involvement in First Nations initiatives can bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and skills.

In providing their final thoughts, providers and organisations emphasised again the **critical role of volunteers in sustaining many organisations**, with some groups noting that they would not function without older volunteers. However, shifting societal trends and work-life dynamics mean fewer people are available to volunteer compared to past generations, when community volunteering was a common expectation. They want to ensure that older people remain visible and valued through continued recognition of their volunteer contributions.

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Themes & Recommendations

Volunteering in an Age-Friendly Queensland

Themes & recommendations

Council on the Ageing Queensland presents to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee (the Committee) the following themes and recommendations as part of the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. We present these recommendations from the perspective of an age-friendly Queensland which includes older volunteers, older people, their communities, and the service providers and community organisations that sustain and support age-friendly communities.

Embed an age-friendly focus in Queensland Volunteering

1. Review current Queensland Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan to be more inclusive of contribution of older adults and sustainability of age-friendly communities

Highlight contribution of older adults in the Queensland Volunteering Strategy to:

- Increase emphasis on older adults and volunteering as part of sustaining age-friendly communities.
- Increase recognition of diversity of older adult volunteer cohorts – that the same diversity and inclusion principles apply to older adult cohorts as they do to younger cohorts through e.g., positive ageing in volunteering examples that combat ageist stereotypes of older adult capacities and capabilities.

Leverage the Action Plan to:

- Invest in projects that encourage and enable community organisations to e.g., develop customised onboarding guides and training materials in multiple languages, establish sensory-friendly volunteering options for neurodivergent volunteers, dementia-friendly options, adaptive volunteer roles that accommodate varying abilities (e.g., phone-based mentoring, virtual volunteer coordination, peer to peer support sessions, online free training for new skills or update existing skills, and face to face options).

2. Invest in sustainable volunteering that better enables attraction and retention of older volunteers

Invest in sector projects that:

- Support organisational redesign towards flexible and responsive volunteer models that allow for both structured and spontaneous participation.
- Encourage targeted strategies to attract and retain older volunteers, ensuring roles align with their skills, interests, and capacities.
- Build stronger support systems for volunteer-led organisations, including funding for training, administration, and governance assistance.
- Strengthen small, regional seniors' organisations to remain viable and responsive to local needs.

- Improve regional transport options for older volunteers, ensuring accessibility, affordability when volunteering

Greater recognition of older and intergenerational volunteer workforces

3. Encourage intergenerational volunteering to promote knowledge-sharing and mentorship

Invest in projects that enable community organisations to:

- Pair older and younger volunteers for skill-sharing (e.g., teaching knowledge on a set topic, practical skills, assistance with technology).
- Create opportunities for schools to introduce structured volunteering projects where students work alongside older volunteers (e.g., community gardening, community kitchens, digital literacy support, literacy and numeracy programs).
- Enable community-run groups and organisations to draw upon older volunteers and share their life experiences and expertise (e.g., financial literacy, creative or manual arts, craftsperson, storytelling) with younger generations.
- Raise public awareness through an annual social media campaign during Seniors Month to showcase the value of older volunteers and intergenerational activities.

Bolster the older volunteer workforce through greater accessibility and improvement to attraction, recruitment, retention and ongoing engagement

4. Reduce digital barriers for older people by supporting community organisations to adapt with alternative engagement methods

Invest in projects that enable community organisations to:

- Offer paper-based sign-ups, simpler administration processes, and drop-in orientation sessions at community hubs such as libraries, community centres, and seniors' interested groups.
- Develop a phone-based registration system where older adults can sign up without needing digital access.
- Organise digital literacy workshops to help older volunteers navigate online platforms for role applications, reporting, and communication.
- Integrating a 'tech buddy' system where younger volunteers assist older volunteers in building their digital literacy.

5. Leverage existing public awareness campaigns to highlight benefits of volunteering

Invest in projects that enable community organisations to:

- Leverage existing campaigns such as Volunteering Queensland's Seniors Volunteering Campaign.

- Showcase diverse volunteers' stories in local media and social media with opportunity to tap into existing evidence-based or successful initiatives ensuring authentic representation of older and intergenerational volunteer workforces.
- Use older community ambassadors to promote volunteering as representatives in underrepresented groups (e.g., culturally and linguistically diverse).

Increase support and training for management of the older volunteer workforce

6. Invest in volunteer coordinators to adopt age-friendly practices

Invest in sector projects that:

- Support training in ageism and ageist practices within volunteering recruitment and management.
- Enable volunteer coordinators to share best practices, insights and resources in relation to older volunteers

7. Reduce bureaucracy by simplifying compliance processes

Invest in projects that enable community organisations to:

- Develop a 'Volunteer Fast-Track' system where returning, existing, and longer-term volunteers can renew and update credentials more easily within one spot.
- Provide assisted onboarding kiosks in community hubs such as neighbourhood and community centres where staff or experienced volunteers assist older volunteers to complete administration processes and paperwork.

Increase volunteering opportunities for older people in regional, rural, and remote communities

8. Expand geographic scope of Volunteering Resource Centres and improve coordination of local opportunities

Invest in regional sector projects that:

- Increase physical volunteering hubs in places such as libraries, neighbourhood and community centres, seniors' interested groups to connect local volunteers with opportunities especially in communities where there is no dedicated Volunteering Resource Centre.
- Establish a mobile volunteer hub (e.g., a community van) that travels to rural and remote areas to assist with training, networking, and recruitment strategies including management approaches. This would include continued promotion of Volunteering Queensland's Seniors Volunteering campaign, and Seniors Volunteering resources and information for older volunteers (potential and existing) and volunteer coordinators and managers, ensuring resources are accessible for as many capacities and abilities as possible.

9. Encourage greater participation through financial incentives for dedicated volunteers

Explore the feasibility for government funded financial incentives to reduce imposition and burden on existing long-term volunteers; particularly where communities have indicated there is urgency or critical need for reform such as in regional, rural and remote communities (emergency, disaster and fire response services, community care and supports, and services supporting at risk cohorts):

- ‘Volunteer Expense Reimbursement Program’ covering transport and meals for key volunteer programs.
- Encourage local businesses to offer discounts or loyalty rewards for longer-term volunteers.

Support First Nations volunteering and community-led approaches

10. Engage First Nations communities in shaping volunteer programs to ensure alignment with community needs and older volunteer expectations

Invest in sector projects that:

- Provide culturally relevant training for non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers working in First Nations communities (e.g., local history, cross-cultural competency, cultural sensitivity, language awareness, cross-cultural and interpersonal communication).
- Partner with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elders and community leaders to co-design volunteer opportunities that align with cultural values and needs of older people.
- Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-led volunteering programs where Elders and older people mentor and support younger generations.
- Respond to the barriers older Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples face when volunteering.

Maximise the Legacy of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

11. Develop a ‘Volunteer Legacy’ program for the 2032 Games that engages older volunteers in ongoing community service

Ensure that Olympic and Paralympic Games planning processes include:

- Sufficient engagement with community groups to ensure existing volunteer supported services are not understaffed during Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The experience that older volunteers acquire with the Games is able to be used post-events in their local communities through:

- Provision of post-games incentives (e.g., certification, recognition, free training) and connections to encourage older volunteers to continue volunteering in local organisations and community hubs.

- Provision of 12 months of networking support post-Games to connect Games volunteers with opportunities in their local communities, ideally for longer-term sustainable volunteer roles (e.g., mentors, educators, and representatives for their regions, communities, or interests) where they can continue making contributions with their recent training from the Games events which will assist community development and support local organisations.

Enhance emergency, disaster, and fire service volunteering

12. Take urgent action to recruit and retain emergency, disaster and fire service older volunteers particularly in regional, rural and remote areas

Invest in emergency services projects that strengthen older people's participation through initiatives such as:

- Targeted recruitment campaigns focussed on older people in agricultural communities and retired professionals
- Destigmatising ongoing mental health support for emergency volunteers, with an enhanced understanding of the older volunteer experience.
- Develop a one-stop volunteer credentialing system to streamline applications across different emergency response organisations, and so volunteer pools can be accessed and connected to in a timely manner.
- Introduce fuel subsidies or tax deductions for rural and remote emergency volunteers, which better enable older people on fixed incomes to volunteer.
- Encouraging local businesses to offer discounts or free services tailored for emergency response volunteers (e.g., gym memberships, discounted meals).
- Promoting roles like radio communication operators, dispatch coordinators, fire tower watch/observation, or community outreach volunteers for older people unable to engage in frontline emergency work.
- Ensure all emergency training videos and briefings are age-friendly and include captions and Auslan interpretation.
- Offer adaptive emergency training for older adults, people living with changing capacities, and people with disabilities.

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Appendix A

Community voices on volunteering

Appendices

Appendix A – Community voices on volunteering

Council on the Ageing Queensland received very knowledgeable and passionate community voices through the January – February 2025 surveys from 60 respondents (older adults, community members, service providers and community organisations). We provide examples of direct voices from diverse Queensland communities (not all quotations have been included).

Examples of specific barriers and considerations

Transport

By promoting more weekend opportunities for volunteering. Life is a 7-day week and I, for one, find the weekends to be the loneliest periods, especially as public transport is more limited than on weekdays. My local bus service ends at 4.30p.m. at weekends. Also, older volunteers are less likely to have medical and other appointments at weekends, making them more available for volunteering.

There is no public transport so they must drive. [...]

Red tape & administration

I wanted to be a volunteer visitor for a Care company. But the red tape & all the stuff I would have to do electronically was just far too much. At my age I am constantly frustrated with technology. I have more important things to do than deal with that. I am a fit 82 & thought it would be good for me as well as their client.

They leave or become demotivated when treated as commodities, overloaded with red tape requirements, especially the trend for lots of additional online own-time training rather than in-person training. Or if they feel overwhelmed by unclear expectations. I have seen older people leave due to this type of requirement. So, I imagine if this was a second language/diverse volunteer it would be daunting. Improvements would be based on balancing govt requirements with a more human approach. Incidentally, I speculate that Volunteers at higher levels such as retired CEOs or advisors have different volunteer experiences.

Connecting with a group. Websites often go out of date and become a hindrance. When volunteers leave or pass away often the person responsible for media and PR is no longer there within an organisation.

Volunteering as ‘need to do’ - social justice & contribution as motivators

Working with OPAN [Older Person Advocacy Network] is a matter of life and death for older people because older people are not taken seriously enough in aged care policy development often characterised by self-interest of providers and ageism.

A feeling that I’m still contributing to creating a better society. This volunteer work is very rewarding, seeing the change in vulnerable people with mental health issues.

If I want something in my life [...] I have learnt the way for me to get it is to "give it away". My action of giving automatically gives the results of my action to me first. I receive the results of my giving automatically.

I think there is a lot of talent wasted through people not volunteering for a range of reasons. But it’s hard to reach out to them, and in some cases, hard to convince people they can contribute as well as receive support.

Volunteering as part of recognition of your life's work

I was an academic for 40 years and felt I received recognition for my skills after retiring.

People are too busy to volunteer these days. Young people are busy with their families. Older people are enjoying their retirement. If people didn't have to work full-time, they're more likely to volunteer and give back. 60 years ago it was normal to volunteer in your community to make it great. No one wants to do it anymore.

Service provider and community organisation perspectives

In certain circumstances, such as the need for a Blue Card for example, 'red tape' may hinder some volunteer engagement, however this doesn't appear to be a regular impediment.

We do not have capacity to deliver a viable volunteer program. It would require at least a part time employee coordinating and managing the program...

Very rarely we have encountered people not willing to comply with the requirement for a Working with Children card. Those people are excluded from volunteer positions which require a card, that is the DO NOT work with children.

Having to be on a board and take positions and be accountable. People want to just do short, one off events and have no responsibility.

Impact of existing responsibilities – caregiver roles

Making a regular commitment when I have irregular family commitments e.g. 96-year-old mother, adult children and grandchildren.

I'm a "kincarer" raising grandchildren and my family obligations aren't considered.

Inflexible or non-inclusive environments

I have volunteered in a couple of different organisations in the past: one with disabled people and one with a local sporting club. I found both were quite inflexible in terms of the expected time commitments for my lifestyle. They wanted me to sign up for a regular roster, as opposed to just when I wanted to be available (to accommodate our travel and family situations). They were also very cliquey. That has turned me off from offering my time to other worthy causes.

I volunteered happily in various charity shops. Enjoyed it generally and was conscientious but with one new management style I did not enjoy being treated like a paid employee - required to open and close the shop to exact timetable meant missing my bus home by 4 mins. I left this whole organisation though I had volunteered with them for 2 years prior.

As an older person with some mobility issues and on an inadequate home care package, I am finding that I have to spend more time looking after my own needs, taking me away from things I could do in my community. If I was looked after better, I would be able to contribute more. A win win.

Older people have lots to give but many older women are already committed to many hours of childcare with grandchildren, especially during school holidays. If QLD wants to enrol more older women in various volunteering, then childcare access and affordability needs to be addressed. Everything is linked like a web in our society :)

There is probably a lot who would get involved but it has to be easier.

Recognition of volunteer workforce

In my opinion volunteers thrive when they feel part of something useful, part of something social, and valued. A simple appreciation of themselves as folk with other commitments and limitations is helpful.

Older people's skills and knowledge is not sought or recognised.

Let them do so as long as they are able to, don't toss them out because they're "too old."

Reimbursement of costs. Ensure organisations appreciate the volunteers and not treat them like unpaid slavery.

[...] [it] would be good to see volunteers celebrated as in Paris.

We couldn't do without our volunteers. They deserve to be valued and recognised.

Future of volunteering

I see NO young people volunteering (unless they are paid to do so); it's all left to us "oldies"; once we die there will be no more volunteering!!!

A lack of people wishing to join service clubs or actually to volunteer. Falling numbers are a big issue. And even our SES members are all ageing.

I have been a volunteer for most of my life, in numerous different organisations & various capacities. I am almost 70 & still volunteering. Sadly, my kids & grandkids would not be seen dead volunteering!

Old farts fighting fires just become liabilities. We need young volunteering.

Finding solutions or workarounds to barriers for participation

At my age, physical volunteering is probably not an option. However, my brain works well, and I am well educated so I think I can contribute in admin and creative areas.

The organisation I volunteer with [Name of Organisation] allows for flexibility. Each school term, volunteers indicate their availability, and the resulting roster includes people on "standby" each week.

Open conversations between volunteers and volunteer coordinator; being open minded and willing to learn; ask questions and seek help, guidance from long-term volunteers or staff members; engage in self-care practices and debrief with fellow volunteers or supervisors after intense experiences; carpooling.

Local area and immediate managers of volunteers need to understand that though generally committed, volunteers are unpaid and may have age related or physical constraints that need to be respected and planned for within the volunteers' structures.

By the removal of constricting Government regulations that make any volunteer work difficult for both the organisation's administration and the would-be volunteers.

Realise that volunteers are volunteers! They do things because they want to, not because they have to, so reduce some of the requirements.

Make sure that the people running the programs are open minded, maybe they have to be younger and not set in their ways.

Communications. "Buddy" system. They need to feel included, wanted, recognised, appreciated.

Free transport to and from site of volunteering. Access to tools, equipment that is not worn out or broken in order to do a decent job.

Many older adults did not grow up with computers, smart phones, social media etc. They need to understand that the world has moved on. But it doesn't mean they have to lag behind. They need to accept this and so do others. They need to do volunteering to suit their knowledge and skills.

Thinking about 2032 Games and leveraging these events to support volunteering

Effective enrolling and training PLUS - RECOGNITION for the work that they will do (offer some 'incentive').

Training should be provided as needed for all games volunteers, regardless of age. Therefore, I would think that older adults could volunteer for just about any area, as long as they are fit for the job physically. Everything else can be learned.

There are physical limitations to older individuals volunteering often e.g. I can only spend half a day on my feet. So, there would need to be great flexibility.

Information sharing. Recognition of skill sets. Some remuneration for travel, meals, etc.

Advertise and inform people of areas required and, what's required to start with. Also, what's parts of the coast are to be used - it covers a very large area and in 7 years' time the current volunteers will be 7 years older and for most people a lot can happen 7 years!! We don't hear enough about Volunteering Qld - what they do, what they've got and how they do it.

Develop inclusive volunteering programs, offer training and new skills development; promote community engagement and social inclusion for older adults; create legacy projects that benefit older adults long after the Games; recognise and celebrate the contributions of older adult volunteers; collaborate with organisations that support older adults to create volunteer opportunities and programs tailored to their needs.

Ensure training is provided, volunteering opportunities are accessible via public transport, shifts are short or appropriate for older adults, wheelchair accessible.

Create a "pen pal" program with locals to connect with people interested in attending or volunteering for events.

The boundaries are unlimited. Government needs to act NOW to recruit and train.

With 'age' as focus, utilise aged candidates in more menial / less stressful tasks.

Those events do not have much significance to communities not directly involved or affected by them.

People who don't volunteer for other community groups will volunteer for the Olympics as it is seen in a different light. Perhaps to be a volunteer at the Olympics you'll need to show volunteering experience.

Good news stories and maybe a website with upcoming volunteering opportunities.

Recognise and thank volunteers for their contributions.

The state government can use the Olympic and Paralympic Games as a platform to establish long-lasting volunteer programs. For instance, creating a "volunteer legacy" initiative that encourages individuals to continue volunteering after the Games. This could include volunteer training programs that extend beyond the event, allowing volunteers to become part of ongoing community efforts.

Community awareness campaigns. More local seminars. Maybe some basic training for volunteers.

Raise awareness of contribution of volunteers and importance of their role; imagine how the world would be if we all volunteered in some capacity.

Provide opportunities for travel to and from, support for accommodation for those coming from rural areas.

General sentiments & understanding volunteer perspectives

Organisations don't take it seriously. They say they want volunteers but do not follow through with providing opportunities.

We need to think more creatively about what older people can do. Often it appears that organisations see volunteers as free workers instead of really thinking about the special contributions they make. They also don't appear to see volunteer management as requiring a special skill set.

Acknowledging that some volunteers will come with a lot of life and work experiences, while others may come with only some. Orientation, paperwork, supervision and communication with the volunteers needs to reflect this.

Acknowledge that people are more likely to volunteer if the schedule/type of "work" suits their lifestyles. Welcome all comers, even if they aren't willing/able to volunteer on as frequent a basis as others.

Check with the paid staff to see if they truly want volunteers involved with day-to-day tasks. Volunteers have a tendency to "melt away" and are not always reliable.

Acceptance in the community that someone who is old, or not as agile as others, can still contribute.

Give older people the opportunity to volunteer in their communities and support them in everything they do. Treat them respectfully and don't assume because they are a certain age they can't do things. Ask them where they see themselves volunteering and provide opportunities.

[...] My background is Organisational Leadership & Management & Cultural Change. Until I (sort of) retired when I was in my late 70's, I did not know or really understand 'older people'. I think that too many Government Committees and Older Persons organisations are managed by people who don't really 'know & understand' from the elderly perspective. [...]

Don't assume just because someone is old, they "don't do tech" or aren't able to learn. Many of us were managers/supervisors/mentors in our working lives and have experience to offer. Not just making sandwiches for the local sports club or delivering meals on wheels, despite those being worthy causes.

Volunteers of all ages need to feel safe, valued and enjoy the role. Costs incurred need to be met. Training provided where necessary. Volunteer numbers appear to be getting lower. Not surprising when time and energies limited.

Emergency response – attraction, retention & increasing opportunities

Reduce red tape. Manage the mental and physical challenges better. Better communications.

Encourage older people to promote these opportunities to younger friends and relatives.

Stop interfering with locally organised groups by trying to control everything centrally.

Need to advertise and recruit young people. Who can gain new and useful skills. Also, they are generally strong and able. Gives them social connection and sense of their value etc.

Provide incentives for time and money spent on volunteer work, introduce a levy for all residents that are not volunteering.

Find out who's interested, what's required to volunteer for emergency response volunteering in Qld. Then inform community and others about the requirements.

I hadn't thought of this, but older people are often in a good position to offer help. E.g. making sandwiches for other volunteers responding to floods. But we need to know how we can do this i.e. communication.

Emergency response volunteering is a legal quagmire. There is no substitute for professional emergency response personnel.

Some of us would like to help in some capacity, but don't want to be out in the field fighting fires or covering roofs with tarps, nor be on call or traveling at night. Accommodating those conditions would possibly increase the pool of willing volunteers. There must be plenty of administrative, planning or logistics, support or training positions that could be suitable for older people to fill.

Provide incentives for time and money spent on volunteer work, introduce a levy for all residents that are not volunteering.

Reduce red tape for volunteers and scrutiny of efforts.

Acknowledge this volunteering time as a skill for looking for employment.

Education sessions at schools for year 12 students and for university students.

Emergency response organisations are constantly trying to recruit here. Again, it comes down to the individual to decide whether they are going to help or not.

SES is always looking for volunteers. Volunteering for emergencies (depending on role) is seen as having had to undergo certain training before being accepted.

We have a Community Early Response Team made up of local volunteers. We also have a strong relationship with the local SES team. Volunteering opportunities are advertised on our local board at the [Name of Place] Hub.

This area requires attention because emergency situations are often very challenging for deaf people because there is rarely adequate information in Auslan available. Volunteer could increase a sense of safety for Deaf people in emergency situations.

Organise free informational sessions or workshops that explain what emergency response volunteering entails, the different roles available, and how volunteers can make a difference. This could target schools, workplaces, and local community groups.

Offer professional development and competency-based skills within, and this may attract younger folk.

Value & positive impact of volunteering on community connectivity & wellbeing

Our community's overall wellbeing heavily relies on volunteers. Without them we would not have the variety of community and sports clubs we currently enjoy. Many of our annual events, as well as one-off performances and opportunities would not happen without volunteers.

People coming to activities are the volunteers, everyone can do a little, helps keep independence and sense of worth.

Volunteers make it possible to respond to an individual's needs in a prompt and effective manner which builds a strong rapport and trust. Individuals know that support is available, and our organisations responses can be flexible.

For some residents, our volunteers may be the only visitor they receive all day or week. They brighten their day and lend an ear to listen to their stories. Without volunteers (like during COVID-19) residents mental health declined because volunteers couldn't visit.

We would not be able to run our program without our volunteers the funding we get in nowhere near sufficient to pay staff to do the work that needs to be done.

It would reduce their loneliness in RAC [Residential Aged Care]; it would give them an opportunity to communicate with their preferred language and it would create a sense of belongingness to their own community.

Keeping them living independently in their homes by transporting them to and from medical and social appointments.

Volunteers positively enhance every aspect of our service by their presence, skills and experience, ideas and contributions.

Without volunteers we could not operate.

Immeasurable value. Without volunteers most, if not all, of our community and sporting groups would not exist. There would be limited community events and opportunities without volunteers.

Without volunteers we wouldn't function as well. Older volunteers are present in all community organisations.

We would not survive without volunteers, our club is self-funded and only paid employees are cleaners.

Without volunteers we would not be able to provide all the programs/groups at a local level. Volunteers also are essential to other non-profit groups e.g. QCWA, Lions Club, Scouts, SES and all churches rely solely on volunteers.

Our volunteers are invaluable. Working in aged care, it's impossible for workers to provide the same level of companionship and meaning to our residents' lives. Especially because many of our residents are unable to go out into the community anymore. Volunteers are the connection between the community and the care centre.

Huge value to both - we are a tourist town and capturing, preserving, storing and making our history accessible greatly enhance the district's attractiveness.

They help spread the word of what we do, they reduce social isolation and the administrative burden of running our program.

We used to have a volunteer program providing friendly visits to older deaf people residing in residential care facilities. The purpose of the volunteer program was to reduce loneliness of deaf older people in RAC [Residential Aged Care] as they are not able to communicate with staff or other residents due to language barriers; to keep them connected with their own local deaf community and provide an opportunity to interact by using their preferred language (Auslan or another sign language). The value for the community is that their senior community members are

cared for and included into the community even though they have limited capacity to actively participate a life of the community.

Keeping costs down so we can offer more services to our elderly clients in our area and keep our clients independent in their homes for longer.

We could not function as a community without people volunteering their time and talents.

They allow us to keep the doors open, they bring years of experience (professional, personal and local) to the organisation.

Community connection, the ability to sell their products, and produce, financial support such as providing fridges for Meals on Wheels, supporting other community groups such as the Dragons annual regional regatta, and also friendships.

If it weren't for older people volunteering some organisations would not function. Continuing and increased focus on contributions of older people could help in keeping older people visible and relevant.

We have a wonderful community with many volunteers offering their valuable time. Volunteers need to have a purpose and feel like no matter how small their contribution is, that it is appreciated, and it makes a difference.

Benefits volunteers gain from involvement with service providers & community organisations

Satisfaction in helping others and keeping things viable.

Purpose. Sense of belonging. The feeling of being connected to the community. Sense of worth through giving to their community and supporting those who need it the most. Being able to contribute to discussions on how our organisation can implement improvement strategies and planning for the future. Friendship and support network.

Knowing they are making a difference in a resident's life before they pass. We have a volunteer reward and recognition program which provides quarterly social events and thank you gifts during National Volunteer Week and Christmas. Thank you and Birthday cards are also sent during the year as well as ongoing appreciation.

Knowledge enhancement, meaningful social interaction, fun, ensuring that we are inclusive and embrace the history of Djiru people.

They build friendships and feel appreciated.

They would learn from older generation and their life experience. It would give them an expose to deaf community and culture.

Primary barriers to volunteering (service provider & community organisation perspectives)

The volunteer base is diminishing. Younger generations do not seem to want to / or are able to / volunteer. This may be due, in part, to being time-poor due to working and raising a family. But there also just seems to be a general reluctance to put their hands up to help.

With aged care, it can be difficult for some volunteers because they fear their own mortality or didn't realise people have the number of health/cognitive issues. They want to volunteer thinking they will be sipping cups of tea and chatting with residents when many of them can't continue a conversation. Time, work and family concerns are also barriers.

People feel they are time poor and/or cannot see the need to part of it. The main barrier is our ability to appeal to young people - we have no younger members or volunteers, and we do little to attract them. Everyone blames it on a degradation of society, but I feel it is our inability to make the case to younger people that is the main barrier.

Our volunteers are ageing, and the next generation is too time poor to step up into the gap. Many competing priorities. A lack of a sense of 'calling' to the work.

No volunteers with Auslan skills; volunteer organisations don't approach and attract deaf people and adjust their training and on boarding to deaf volunteers. My observation is that volunteering in deaf space is forgotten.

Most volunteers are looking for social interaction and appreciation they do not want any responsibility or too much work, which is fair enough really...

Busy schedules, aligning the right person for the right job.

Impact of legislative & regulatory requirements on volunteering

Although we are aware and understand the legislative and regulatory requirements our not-for-profit club has been run by volunteers since 1977 and pride ourselves on working as a team and looking after our volunteers as best as possible. We do not impose any requirements on our volunteers, we always have them try out first to see if they like the work before getting them to commit to a regular volunteering regime. We do what works for our club.

Many volunteers in the 50+ age group are not computer literate, so I need to complete paperwork with them or it deters them from becoming a volunteer. There has been a recent change to the police checks where volunteers must complete an informed consent form. This is just an additional bit of paperwork that asks the same questions as in the police check. I've gone from completing a police check with a volunteer in 10-15 minutes to 1 hour now.

Our organisation is very small, so we do not have the excessive induction requirements that many larger organisations have. I have heard from colleagues in other larger organisations that induction requirements put off many potential volunteers.

The costs and red tape involved and need for insurance - every year there are new impositions legislated by all levels of government.

No[t] hugely, the main barrier to us is limited resources; firstly, how to fund our own volunteer program including onboarding, training, police check etc (if establishing one again) and how to attract volunteers.

We are mostly impacted by the government and organisational requirements for workplace health and safety and child protection, as well as the protection of vulnerable people. We understand our obligations and they are generally not difficult to comply with. The only difficulty we experience is a cultural one, working with volunteers and members from an African community who do not understand the importance of compliance.

Common motivations for volunteer workforces (service provider or community organisation perspectives)

Honestly, the same small group volunteer in order to keep clubs and groups operating.

Wanting to keep their brain active; meeting new people; supporting our club so it keeps running.

Having grandparents, they loved talking to and miss now. Having parents or other loved ones they've provided care for. Having a particular interest/hobby I've advertised help for.

People care for their community members and are concerned about older deaf people living in RAC [Residential Aged Care].

A sense of calling and wanting to make a difference, to use the skills and talents that they have to offer. to be of service.

Challenges volunteers face in their roles (service provider or community organisation perspectives)

Burn out - eventually the small group who continually raise their hands just can't keep going.

Acceptance by others if new to group, learning the culture and whether they feel safe.

Difficult club members; high expectations by club members (e.g. volunteers expected to do more than is fair and reasonable- club members forget that it is not a paid position); health issues that interrupt their wanting to volunteer;

In general, volunteers have to do more work than they signed up for and this is because many people don't volunteer.

Too much work falls to the few that are willing to help on a regular basis which often leads to high turnover.

They have other commitments, too. Deaf older people in RACs [Residential Aged Care] are scattered across the whole state/country. long travel times. No reimbursement for petrol

Time is often the biggest barrier. Sometimes travel or transport is a problem. I am surprised that some people find the distance between Toowoomba and Highfields a barrier to participation.

Time, fitting in travels and volunteering, or work and volunteering, cost of joining including insurance, having to take on board positions.

Improving the volunteer experience (service provider and community organisation perspectives)

Greater recognition of the value of volunteering.

Go in with an open mind. try and work with others. Different roles in different organisations require different skills so be prepared to adjust but if it doesn't feel right, it might not be the place for you.

We are this year offering incentives - Star Volunteer of the Month; Lunch as a group once each year; closed for 4 weeks at Christmas. I believe you just need a caring, friendly volunteer environment and in our case, time for debriefing and allowing the fact that we all make mistakes.

Provide a purpose and an opportunity to contribute to programs and decision-making process - then ensuring feedback is provided re outcomes.

Volunteers need to feel appreciated. You don't need a budget to say thank you or comment on the good work they've done.

Mostly we must be more creative to appeal to younger citizens and create ways they can participate and be interested.

It is very hard for me to get regular reliable volunteers. I have many volunteers, but most do very little, it is better than nothing so I am grateful for the help I get but there should be more reward for those that put in a lot of work. Unfortunately, we don't have enough funding to reward them financially. If we did it would really help with the turnover. Maybe the government could allow charities and not for profits to pay seniors/retired volunteers at a lower than award negotiated rate and make any money earned in this way exempt from any calculations that might reduce their pension or disadvantage them in any other way.

Dedicated funding for small community driven organisations which won't have high volume, instead their volunteer programs would target special need groups.

An advertising campaign on the benefits of volunteering would probably have some impact. I don't see any need to reduce red tape from our perspective.

Working hard to align the right person to the role - including clarity of expectations, e.g. via position description.

Diverse volunteers

Working with & supporting diverse volunteers

Few people of diverse backgrounds to volunteer. Have yet to work with someone in this group.

We are open to anyone and everyone but rarely have anyone from a diverse background. We have had volunteers with disabilities but majority of time they do not last as it is not an easy volunteer job at our club.

Being flexible in our approaches and being supportive.

All volunteers are given the level of support they need. So, if someone from a diverse background needs more support to learn the role, then they will be provided additional time. I also check in with them more often.

We do much to interact with Djiru people and we assist elderly people but little else.

We pair them with other volunteers that speak the same 1st language and offer them opportunities to share their cultural background with our members.

We are an organisation focusing on a community which identifies itself as CALD [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse] community with their own language and identity. We are a bilingual organisation, most of our resources are both English and Auslan.

Ensuring that volunteer roles, initiatives, and opportunities are open to people from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, providing an environment where everyone's voice is valued.

This has been a contentious issue as we have repeatedly asked for help with our internal child protection training for our African community (appropriate in terms of culture and language). That being said, we are finding increasing participation from the members of our community who are of African heritage, and this seems to be a result of building relationships, being present and sharing information frequently.

We have no restrictions and would welcome all. We currently have a member who is 83 and have two members from Tonga.

As in all communities, there are cliques and groupings - some of these are loathe to let newcomers in particularly if they do not fit the local "mould".

I do not consider myself of diverse background but even for myself it took courage to fulfil a desire to volunteer. If I came from a culturally diverse background perhaps I would have challenges with: social codes and conventions, language, fears or mistrust of dominant culture, doubt about own abilities or what is required of volunteer role, physical differences and how they will impact or be accepted (though generally I noticed many older volunteers under Centrelink have disabilities or chronic illnesses) and transport.

They often don't get asked to volunteer and are not always well-prepared by organisation.

That's almost a 'case by case' situation. If people have limited mobility, capacity, language barriers then they would require qualified assistance in order to be an effective volunteer. On site staff are already flat out with their own tasks and do not necessarily have the time or motivation to help "newbie" volunteers. Volunteers need a reasonably comprehensive induction "course" to be of genuine help.

Creating an inclusive and supportive environment, providing cultural competency training and ensuring volunteering opportunities are accessible to everyone.

Everyone I volunteer with has significant, health, mobility & cultural issues - age is the only problem: no volunteers under the age of 40-ish.

To get the best outcome for ANYONE in a work or volunteer situation is perhaps based on understanding and respect between parties this involves an environment that is practical for diverse needs and importantly for all...to take time to discover what the interests of the individual volunteers are and how these can be incorporated into the goals of the organisation. Because diversity is ...diverse... each organisation needs to address what they are prepared to or are capable of doing on an overall basis and on an individual basis. Questions to continue considering...why would a diverse person wish to volunteer? Would this be the same as for anyone? Could it be a way to enter into a local community, make friends, feel useful, overcome isolation, be accepted?

Yes - older people are the majority of our volunteers - your survey should be focused on people under 60 years age not over 60s.

Unique challenges volunteers face from different age groups, genders & abilities

Volunteer roles/opportunities are often limited to weekdays which does not suit many as people have to work to keep up with the cost of living.

Aged care doesn't have many male volunteers. If we do it's because they have specific roles like bus driver volunteer or BBQ volunteer.

Age is the main factor. Younger people are yet to be attracted to our society. Females are 80% of our participants. We do little to attract males.

Most of our volunteers are women and most are seniors. Technology is our greatest barrier I find more volunteers willing to help make sandwiches and serve tea but not many who will do any data entry or other work involving a computer.

Older volunteers may have less familiarity with newer tools or technologies used in virtual work or digital communication. Older individuals may face physical health issues that make certain volunteer tasks more difficult.

Generational gap between younger and older.

We find it difficult to get young people together because of their diverse extra-curricular activities (part time jobs, study commitments and sporting commitments). For older volunteers, there are time constraints, physical barriers (sometimes) and transport barriers (sometimes).

Mobility and health issues for some volunteers.

Opportunities for improved participation and accessibility for all volunteers

Anyone and everyone can volunteer - they just need to put their hands up and they will be welcomed and appreciated.

People who volunteer all their life seem to have a greater respect for the capacities and abilities of others and help slot people into suitable roles. Welcome newcomers and allow them to develop their skills but ensure long term volunteers maintain their roles and are cared for too. Respecting older people's rights to retire from volunteering on their terms makes a difference to their self-worth and volunteering experience.

We have tried some volunteer weekend opportunities through our Community Garden program but still young families have sporting or other household commitments with their children.

Most people are able to volunteer even if they need accessibility support, as long as they don't add additional work to our care staff.

Mainly be more creative and inclusive - probably can only do it one-on-one; not sure we have given this much thought. We merely know we have few volunteers, and a small number do 99% of the work and we are not attracting males or youth.

If we had more funding we could train more volunteers, but few if any would be willing to commit so much for unpaid work.

Deaf Connect has plans, programs and activities to address this matter e.g. arranging community events which attract both young and older and offering avenues for people from various backgrounds to share their life experience.

Offering flexible or part-time volunteer opportunities can accommodate older volunteers who may have other commitments, such as healthcare or family obligations. Designating a point of contact or mentorship program for older volunteers can provide them with a sense of belonging and support. This guidance helps them feel comfortable asking questions and addressing any issues as they arise.

We are working on approving some of our amenities for accessibility and to reduce physical labour required to undertake some tasks.

Openness and support in volunteer management.

We are a small community so most people know what opportunities there are, but still may not formally join Rotary or Meals on Wheels or SES etc. They often just want to be a "friend of".

Efficacy of and suggestions for improvements regarding government support

Government at all levels does not get involved with volunteer recruitment, unless they themselves require assistance for an event.

Blue card applications and renewals are a lot easier since the portal. Annual Federal Volunteer grants are also very helpful.

I attended a local government seminar which included good information from Volunteering Qld. I would have appreciated a follow up email to share electronic copies of the presentation and templates so that these could be shared and adapted for our use.

I don't necessarily think this is an issue for government to 'fix'. I think this comes down to the individual.

Volunteering should not be dependent on government support. People volunteer for the community good, for personal reasons. While major happenings, events need coordination and this involves multiple organisations, government bureaucracy before the grass roots level of volunteers so one organising body for volunteers.

Not sure but maybe the funding for volunteers be a bit easier to access and not restricted so much, currently unless changed, it cannot be food etc. but why not - why not treat them to a lovely morning tea, or lunch or party or boat trip. Funding is usually for things like First aid or equipment, not really what volunteers need or want.

More training and skills development opportunities being offered at no cost to volunteers.

Allow people to have 2 or more days off paid leave each year to volunteer.

Council Executive is very isolated [...] they are extremely averse to community consultation - they do things to enable them to claim they listen but never have an interest in us or any other volunteer organisations in the region. Lip service.

Any sort of incentive, subsidy, reward or tax offset they could give to volunteers would help.

Governments can offer tax deductions or credits for individuals who volunteer a certain number of hours per year. This would help incentivize more people to engage in volunteer activities, especially for those who might otherwise face financial barriers. Providing free or low-cost training for volunteers to improve their skills in areas like leadership, communication, and specialized fields (such as disaster response or social services) can make volunteering more accessible to everyone, regardless of background or experience.

Community awareness campaigns. More local seminars. Maybe some basic training for volunteers.

More advertising of different organisations and raising public awareness. Maybe a People of Action campaign.

Guaranteed funding for Volunteering Qld. Establishing a government insurance scheme that can provide coverage for all voluntary organisations and their volunteers.

Provide incentives to off-set some of the costs. Volunteers save the governments multi-millions every year.

Volunteering opportunities need promotion. Need to be available to all ages.

Dedicated and trained management. Understanding of community and individual volunteer needs. More support for groups such as Volunteering Queensland and Volunteering Redlands.

Financial support to purchase organisation laptops etc that can go with the role, so that when that position moves on, the next person doesn't have a start everything up from scratch.

Unfortunately, it's a huge need so we need lots of discussion with government representatives etc as to how we can meet needs now and into the future.

Encourage programs that bring together volunteers of different ages. This can foster mutual learning and understanding, and create a sense of community across generations; Leverage the skills and expertise of older adults by creating opportunities for them to mentor or train younger volunteers; Actively reach out to older adults in the community to inform them about volunteering opportunities; Regularly seek feedback from older volunteers to understand their experiences and identify areas for improvement; Continuously recognise and celebrate the contributions of older volunteers.

First Nations communities

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers

We are open to all older people accessing our activities and events. While we have only one active ATSI [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander] participant she is involved in all aspects.

All local individuals are encouraged to volunteer whenever they have time available. Set programs provide direct opportunities to engage.

Extremely well - our President is very close to the Djiru people, and we do many joint ventures with them.

We don't have any they would be welcome but there is a local community group specifically for ATSI [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander] that they all prefer to go to.

We work closely with Deaf people from ATSI [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander] background and have dedicated support for them.

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers is crucial for ensuring that volunteer efforts are inclusive, culturally respectful, and meaningful. When involving Indigenous communities in volunteer programs, it is important to recognise and honour their unique cultures, traditions, and histories while fostering opportunities for collaboration and empowerment.

Unfortunately, we don't have any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers. I feel we need to address cultural safety and work more closely with local First Nations groups to rectify this.

Role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers in community

ATSI [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander] people are volunteers of organisations around the town, being committee members of sporting and community groups.

If we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander residents in care, they provide companionship.

Big role - we have an active Djiru elder on our panel who acts as our Cultural Advisor.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers play a vital role in our community, contributing their unique perspectives, skills, and cultural knowledge to a wide range of volunteer efforts. Their involvement not only strengthens the effectiveness of programs but also fosters a deeper sense of connection and cultural understanding in the community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers are vital for visibility and relationship building.

Important as connectors for other First Nations peoples.

Very little but we do sorry programs stuck as glaucoma and eye health kits.

How Volunteering supports First Nations communities

Volunteering can show that people working together for the common good improves sense of commitment and achievement, develops friendships and overall satisfaction.

Seek to understand their people and include them where we can - we do that well. That is far from our challenge now - other issues are the problem, if anything we focus too much energy on that aspect of our district.

Volunteering can play a crucial role in supporting First Nations communities by providing practical assistance, raising awareness, and contributing to the empowerment and sustainability of these communities. Volunteers bring diverse skills, knowledge, and energy that can complement and strengthen existing community efforts.

Build confidence and a sense of community.

Providing mentoring opportunities.

General sentiments - First Nations communities & volunteering

We need to recognise and respect First Nations People and give them opportunities. The Qld Gov has taken a 'step backwards' in this process and it will probably happen at a Federal level!

Firstly, in Qld, to overcome the discrimination that occurs. Acknowledge these people as survivors of outright killing by ordinary English people who were told they could have land, and that Australia was 'terra nullis'. There has been a lot of poor/non education to the everyday person, which is reinforced. Give First Nations people a go. They might be a different culture, but it doesn't mean we have to discriminate against them. Do we do this to other cultures? The answer is No!

Get the organisers / chiefs out to those areas and provide information more frequently. Even just one representative at a time. Invite members of their groups to visit other community volunteer groups to see how they operate. Provide newsletters with updated information, telephones, zoom meetings, face to face gatherings.

Provide training for volunteers to ensure they understand and respect the cultural practices and traditions of First Nations communities; Collaborate with local First Nations organisations to develop volunteer programs that align with the community's needs and priorities; Create flexible and accessible volunteering opportunities that accommodate the unique needs of older adults and those living in rural and remote areas (virtual volunteering options and transportation support); Increase funding and resources for volunteer programs in First Nations communities; Advocate for policies and legislation that support volunteering in First Nations communities and address the unique challenges faced by older adults in rural and remote areas.

Listen and learn about the needs of First Nations' communities. Where possible, volunteers should be First Nations' people.

Support by ensuring Reliable transport for all parties, engage first nation mentor to assist both parties enrol older Australians interested in volunteering in First Nation communities. Aim to build understanding and trust with all parties involved, this may need a subtly built awareness of stereotyping and historical power relations (if possible in an informal environment). Base volunteering on a PROJECT that both parties can focus on - match volunteers' skills and interests with the type of project and First Nations community to determine a project important to them, or else there is little point. At least those are my thoughts.

By allowing the communities to organise themselves, rather than bringing in "white" outsiders.

It is acknowledg[ing] the older people who do the majority of volunteering, motivate younger people to do something for others.

Make wider community aware of needs.

A large, dark blue triangle graphic that points towards the bottom-left corner of the page, serving as a background for the title.

Appendix B

Volunteer Vignettes

Appendix B – Volunteer vignettes

From our community engagement and survey insights we provide below vignettes from older volunteers³¹ which represent the diverse contexts in which informal and formal volunteering takes place. We also include a vignette from an interview with a long-term volunteer.

1. *Margaret from the Brisbane North region spoke very positively of her experience with long term volunteering for an organisation called the Pyjama Foundation which makes a difference to young people's lives and assists in increasing their literacy rate. She spoke of the ability to connect intergenerationally and cherished this opportunity mentioning the mutual benefits of volunteering.*
2. *Grace who resides in the Cairns region told us that she undertook substantial hours in caring for grandchildren and a wider family, but also caring for other families in the community who were experiencing food insecurity or financial stress. Grace was very grateful for the leftover food from the forum we had run, and said she would use it immediately for an afternoon tea she regularly hosted where she provided a meal for a mother and her children. The mother had limited access to transport and would regularly ride her bike to Grace's house. The mother was gradually regaining her health following a period of substance abuse and had developed chronic health issues.*
3. *Hinata from the Rockhampton region had been volunteering in a residential aged care facility, following a period when her sister had moved there after chronic health issues had worsened due to a health event. Anita used to enjoy volunteering but had recently experienced burnout with juggling volunteer work and ongoing care for multiple family members.*
4. *Sonia lives in a suburban area and has been seeking volunteer work. She prefers administrative work involving computers. One organisation wanted her complete resume from the first date she ever commenced work, which she declined as she considered this detail irrelevant. Another opportunity was a role in a school, but they offered tuckshop duties only, which Sonia felt was better suited for parents who had children at the school. Another school interviewed her, and she applied for a Blue Card so that she could read to students and work in their library. She found out later that her Blue Card application was never submitted, and there was no follow up contact from the school, and then the school secretary would not accept her phone call. Despite asking for administrative type roles, yet another person offered Sonia a volunteer role cleaning windows, mopping floors, pressure cleaning walkways, etc. In relation to the rest of her volunteer role applications – they never returned her calls.*
5. *Mayumi is a committed U3A volunteer based in a coastal community and teaches a two-hour creative writing program which runs over 40 weeks during the year. In addition to teaching the program, and the time intensive preparation for each week's program, she also spends time providing feedback on people's writing and those seeking professional feedback. Mayumi, who describes herself as a 'Type A personality', who has always worked, also considers herself an introvert who does not like 'lightweight social interaction.' Despite the intellectual demands she finds the work cognitively stimulating and rewarding.*

³¹ Pseudonyms have been used for volunteers. All six vignettes capture the voices of older women.

6. Interview with long-term volunteer – Patricia

Patricia lives in suburban Brisbane and has been a long-term volunteer and held multiple volunteer roles throughout her life. As an older female Patricia has found herself in many carer type roles checking in on wellbeing of neighbours, friends, caring for a mother with dementia, and now as a carer for her spouse. In addition, Patricia is a grandparent.

Patricia travels weekly to Brisbane City on the bus to volunteer one day per week for an organisation in the community services sector. She has been in her role with the organisation for over 20 years. Patricia has seen staff come and go, witnessed lots of organisational change, and sector reforms in her time with the organisation. The organisation view Patricia as a Volunteer Champion, Knowledge Holder, and Lived Experience Expert on set topics. Patricia brings to her role a highly educated innate understanding of regional, rural and remote communities due to an earlier life living on a large farming property.

On the farm, she was often called into a volunteer role to attend to injured farm workers and help when emergencies arose on the property or in the wider farming community. Patricia mentioned Red Cross volunteers, and instances of rural accidents where there was a point of triage and when there were no other services available – often farmers wives, nearby nurses or midwives, and similar roles – anyone who was already ‘embedded’ in the community would assist. Patricia described this community mindset and volunteering as “something that goes on in your head.” Patricia explained she cultivated this mindset through growing up in a household and “a family that’s stepped out and done.”

This mindset led Patricia to continue volunteering through all stages of life. For example, she enjoyed, as a parent, remedial reading programs with primary school children (when her own children were school aged) assisting them to cultivate and strengthen their literacy. Patricia later enjoyed a professional working life developing skillsets in diverse roles while continuing to volunteer her time assisting the family – assisting her adult children, siblings – and those family members themselves were long-term volunteers on committees, community groups, etc. They have always been a family of volunteers.

During her retirement years, Patricia has developed an interest in advocacy and in particular has curiosity and passion for researching Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD), aged care reforms and treatment of older people in society (including mistreatment and abuse of older people and ageism). She has family members who have worked or work in legal, social services, and medical fields. Patricia has a very high level of health literacy and a deep understanding and appreciation of legislation, policies, systems and issues that impact older people.

Patricia undertakes her current role for personal satisfaction and to contribute to community and wider society. Part of her volunteer role is to capture trending themes and topics from the community and social services sector and provide feedback (a ‘sense check’ on proposed initiatives) on projects, consultative roles with internal and external reports or outputs (raising concerns or angles from an older person lens), and approaches to community engagement (suitability of approach e.g., online, face to face, or survey tools). Patricia knows the organisational history well, the structure and legacy of past projects, programs and changes. She has also recently worked within the organisation on intergenerational understandings of ageing through partnerships with universities (e.g., mentoring, providing advice through lived experience to younger students, advice and insights for university research teams). Patricia has commented that her time at the organisation affords her a break from her carer role and provides social and intellectual connection to colleagues she has known for some time.

Patricia believes that people in general undertake volunteering for different reasons, but a main driver is for skill development and expansion of skillsets (with the reassurance of an appropriate environment to cultivate the skillset). She views a supportive environment as crucial to the individual volunteer’s skill development. Patricia mentions that generally volunteers face different challenges, some of the biggest are costs incurred to travel, especially if someone is transitioning to a non-driving lifestyle or going through

a licence renewal process, time commitment when juggling other commitments, management of volunteer staff, and recognition of volunteers (in general). People can gain personal satisfaction from roles, but more needs to be done to bring our skills or develop skills, and we need to think outside the square for solutions with a focus on teaching, engaging and key messaging depending on the field of volunteering.

She believes that strong and clear organisational frameworks and regulations are key to keeping volunteers supported, in addition to good training for Chief Executive level roles, management and coordination roles, and those who manager and supervise volunteer workforces. Patricia also believes it is important to develop a 'non-abilities' wish list – the volunteer has a list of skills or capabilities that they have yet to develop and would like to develop (and ideally, are supported to do so). She also feels that there needs to be more conflict resolution skills developed and promoted, and communication skills (for everyone working with and supporting volunteer workforces).

Patricia feels that there is no 'one thing' or 'nothing' that will help to improve upon others' volunteering experiences because this is something personal – a personal thing that someone wants to do – this comes down to the individual's worldview and perspective (and their own headspace). Further, she believes there are unique challenges for volunteers from diverse backgrounds and these challenges need to be acknowledged and accepted by the environment in which they work and the people they work with. Some of the challenges she believes people face come from lack of understanding of one's religion or faith, or misunderstanding or lack of consideration of cultural background, and people may feel less welcome or like they have to "hide themselves to get on with a life." Patricia believes that volunteering could be made more accessible and inclusive for people from diverse backgrounds through more awareness raising around e.g., ageism, sexism, racism, ableism, and training for paid and unpaid staff around these topics.

In terms of efficacy of government support, Patricia says, "People sitting the big chair don't realise volunteers are need to extend the organisation that they're in charge of." Getting more people on the ground and working underneath a volunteer manager and "so many organisations can't run without volunteers." Improvements can be made with professionalism, communications and training, and provision of more supports. Further, more thoughts need to get into Peer Education type models with ongoing support.

With the 2032 Games, Patricia thinks the benefits and perks e.g., free merchandise, tickets to events, uniform, etc. is tied to a visible identity and these types of incentives will attract all types of personalities and bring forth bigger ideas. In relation to emergency response volunteering, Patricia feels it is essential, and we need to see more volunteers, and this need will increase as climate change impacts continue. She also mentioned that other people could be in some of the roles, rather than drawing upon the volunteer workforce continually. There is also a need for more volunteers to be 'picked up' by government organisations and have paid people to organise the volunteers, "Support people for the support people." Through a regional and rural lens, catering services need to also be considered to sustain volunteers and workers on the ground during events and clean-up post-events.